ゼロの使い魔
8
〈望郷の小夜曲(セレナーデ)〉
ヤマグチノボル
MF文庫J

Novel Illustrations

ヤマグチノボル（やまぐち・のぼる）

1972年2月、茨城県生まれ。『カナリア～この想いを歌にのせて』（角川スニーカー文庫）でデビュー。著書に『グリーングリーン 緑ノ音ファンタスティック』『つっぱれ有明川』（共に角川スニーカー文庫）『描きかけのラブレター』（富士見ミステリー文庫）『サンタ・クラリス・クライシス』（富士見ファンタジア文庫）『グリーングリーン 緑ノ音スタンド・バイ・ミー』（MF文庫J）などを数、小説連載も数多く手がけている（富士見ファンタジアバトルロイヤルなど）。『グリーングリーン』『Gonna Be!?』『ゆきうた』『私立アキバ学園』『魔界天使ジブリール』『そらうた』など、ゲームシナリオライターとしても活躍中。

イラストレーター

◎**鬼塚エイジ**（うさつか・えいじ）

大阪出身、大阪在住の大型人。6月16日生まれ。
趣味、サウンドノベルなどのイラストを描かせて頂いてます。
今までの参加作品は『富士さきがいっぱい』『電撃文庫』
『ハンター者の指輪千明四へ～』『GA文庫』です。

カバーイラスト／鬼塚エイジ　装丁／blue

ゼロの使い魔8

聖郷の小夜曲

ヤマグチノボル

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メディアファクトリー

ゼロの使い魔8　聖郷の小夜曲

才人はある日突然使い魔として異世界に「召喚」されてしまった高校生。魔法使いの可愛いご主人様・ルイズが従軍したアルビオンとの戦いで、ルイズを逃がすために戦った才人は、大怪我をして意識を失ってしまう。倒れていたところを金髪の美しい少女に助けられ、なんとか一命をとりとめた。少女の名はティファニア。森の中で隠れるように暮らしている彼女は、特殊な生い立ち故に臆病で恥ずかしがり屋だが、献身的に才人の世話をしてくれる。一方、学院に戻ったルイズとシエスタたちは、才人が死んでしまったのではないかという不安と哀しみにとらわれていた――。二人の運命はいかに!?　大人気の異世界使い魔ファンタジー、第8弾！

MF文庫J ヤマグチノボルの本

- **グリーングリーン** 緑ノ音スタンド・バイ・ミー（原作・監修／GROOVER　イラスト／くろま舞台）
- **ゼロの使い魔**（イラスト／兎塚エイジ）
- **ゼロの使い魔2** 風のアルビオン（イラスト／兎塚エイジ）
- **ゼロの使い魔3** 始祖の祈祷書（イラスト／兎塚エイジ）
- **ゼロの使い魔4** 誓約の水精霊（イラスト／兎塚エイジ）
- **ゼロの使い魔5** トリスタニアの休日（イラスト／兎塚エイジ）
- **ゼロの使い魔6** 聖獣の炎赤石（イラスト／兎塚エイジ）
- **ゼロの使い魔7** 銀の降臨祭（イラスト／兎塚エイジ）
- **ゼロの使い魔8** 聖郷の小夜曲（イラスト／兎塚エイジ）

ゼロの使い魔 8

〈望郷の小夜曲（セレナーデ）〉

ヤマグチノボル

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AGNÈS
The Captain of Tristain's Muskerteers. A trusted friend of Henrietta, she lives for vengeance, however,...
TIFFANIA
The girl who helped Saito when he was on the brink of death. She's a shy and timid person.
SAITO
(Hiraga Saito)
A highschool student who was "summoned" as a familiar by Louise. He is injured fatally in the battle with Albion Army.
LOUISE
User of "Void", the legendary magical branch. She's a proud and obstinate person, but she's strongly attracted to her familiar, Saito.
TABITHA
Also known as "Tabitha the Snowstorm". A reticence person, her hobby is reading. Although she has a small build, her magical power is immense.
KIRCHE
Also known as "Kirche the Ardent". Her relationship with Louise is at odds, but she's a close friend to Tabitha.

ゼロの使い魔8
望郷の小夜曲（セレナーデ）

ヤマグチノボル

MF文庫J

Chapter One: Each End of the War

“How about it? This was a reward from bristle spirits of the dead.”

Guiche, proud as a peacock, showed his Medal of White Hair Soul to his classmates.

“Waah,” classmates sighed.

“Could it be that it’s not White Hair but Bristles?”

Someone commented, Guiche blushed.

“Aah! Don’t say that! It's White Hair reward!”

Guiche glimpsed the nook of the classroom. Montmorency was there. Though all his classmates had gathered around Guiche, Montmorency, on the other hand, rested her elbows on a desk and stared outside the window, looking disinterested. *Hey, look this way, I want you to hear the story…* Guiche felt hurt for a moment.

“Great… Guiche, you commanded the company that lunged first into the city of Saxe-Gotha?”

“Don't mention it,”

Guiche proudly nodded. Everyone praised their classmate who had great military achievements.

“No way, Guiche. Honestly before now we thought that you were just a big mouthed rascal, but now we can recognize our mistake without fail!"

“Great! Guiche! You are awesome!”

Guiche leaned back listening. Then he crossed his legs, and put up a finger still

looking as proud as a peacock.

“Now, I will tell you the story about the brave army fight against the orcs.”

Aaaah, the stir happened.

Guiche looked at Montmorency again. And sighed painfully. The reason was that Montmorency still looked the other way... why was she acting this way… Guiche became sadder. He then raised his voice higher than needed. “When the wall broke, orcs came from inside, one after another! At that time, I calmly commanded my subordinates from the gun corps. First platoon! Load! Aim! Fire!”

When saying "Fire" Guiche raised and lowered his wand.

“Still, the enemy didn't flinch! Magic was needed! I rose and started casting - Earth Hand!”

He cast the spell where the hand expands from the ground and grabs one’s feet.

However, there was no soil in the classroom. Nothing happened. A strange silence swelled.

“Ka-boom! Valkyrie emerged!“

Guiche rejected the cane trying to cover himself up again. Petals of the artificial rose scattered around… and changed into seven Valkyries.

“Towards the upcoming orcs, my brave golems jumped out!”

Valkyries began to dance imitating the fight.

Someone recited the winds spell towards Guiche’s golems.

Valkyries were blown off and fell on the floor.

“Who?!”

With a sarcastic smile on his lips, De Lorraine watched Guiche. Before Tabitha’s fabulous results, he was counted to be the strongest in duels among the boys.

“If your golems were blown off by Wind magic, how were they able to withstand orcs' blows?”

“Uuh…”

Guiche dropped in a cold sweat. Feeling on a roll, he had enlarged the story without thinking.

“Well… A decoy! My golems were a decoy, used to distract the attacking enemies!”

“Hey hey, I heard a while ago, that it was all the musketeers' doing. Did your magic fail? You are not so great, Guiche!”

“S-Subordinate soldiers were under commander's control!”

“But didn't you just say that it was all about your magic? Please give my sincere admiration to your company once you meet them. However, were you really a decent lead? Maybe you were leaving most things on your sub-commander's shoulders?”

Bull’s eye, Guiche felt petrified. This revealed a contradiction in Guiche’s story. Well, he needed to keep on talking to buy some time… meanwhile Montmorency stood up and left the classroom.

Guiche ran after her in a panic.

“Montmorency!”

Guiche shouted in a corridor paved with stone. Yet, Montmorency didn’t turn around, she just walked away briskly. Feeling anger emanating from her shoulders, Guiche ran up closer.

“Oi oi, please wait! Are you mad because of what I said? Darling! Hear me out, stop ignoring me!”

Guiche put a hand on Montmorency's shoulder and made her halt.

“Here, look at it. A medal! Be happy! You are the girlfriend of someone worthy of an award! As I said, here, you...“

“That doesn’t make my opinion of you any better.”

After finally turning around, Montmorency declared.

“W-Why?”

“Is the reward all that you care about? You left me without saying anything, that’s the problem!”

Not expecting such an attack, Guiche flinched. Spoiled by the praises, he could not imagine being blamed this way. “D-Don’t you know?! As a Royal Army volunteer, I could not write you letters!”

Montmorency, stared at Guiche with cold eyes. Feeling that this anger was different from usual, Guiche become silent.

“Even if it was so! That didn't mean you could not contact me! There are some things that are more important than a reward!”

He thought for a while.

“For instance?”

Because Guiche asked seriously, Montmorency’s cheeks turned red.

“Aya! Why you are hitting me!”

“Me. M-E.”

“Y-Yes.”

“Aren’t you my knight? Haven’t you told me, that if there would be a war you would stay near, protecting me? Remember?”

"Ye-Yes.”

Guiche stood upright and nodded.

“Since you left with the boys, dreadful things happened in the Academy! Meanwhile, you were going crazy attacking enemies for medals!”

That’s right… Guiche nodded. Upon returning he heard the story.

“Because you were not here, a teacher saved us, paying with his life. If only I was more skillful in water magic…”

Montmorency closed her eyes, recalling that time. She started curing Colbert who was wounded by the magic arrows, but even though water magic was used... she reached her willpower’s limit and fainted.

Guiche quietly lowered his head.

“I, I will study more. As a member of the Montmorency house that negotiated with the Water Spirit for generations… I will ask for help to train more. If I were better at water healing… I might have helped the teacher.”

Since Colbert didn't have any relatives, Kirche took his remains. Since Kirche left home for now, she wasn’t around. It was unclear if she was going to bury the similar Fire element user in the land of Germania. The tiny girl with short blue hair, disappeared as well.

"Furthermore, even that child lost her important person. So be a little more considerate. Is this really a time for joy? Even you should not be so happy."

Guiche remembered.

There was a rumor that Louise’s familiar Saito fought alone against Albion’s army and allowed them to retreat from Rosais.

Shaken, Louise met many times with the generals, but even though she made lots of noise, the escaping fleet would not turn back for the familiar.

Moreover, the warship commanders just laughed at that rumor. They thought it was impossible for a single person to stop an army. You cannot stop 70,000 soldiers all alone.

As for the Albion army's delay, there had to be another reason. It was blamed on their poor army management. They also thought that this familiar boy just simply ran away.

All the people around Louise kept on saying that.

And even if you assume he confronted an army of 70,000 – there was no way he would still be alive. Sadly, she should give up…

However, Louise was not content with such an opinion and kept denying it. Once the fleet returned, the news about Albion’s army surrendering to Gallia raised the confusion to the maximum. They stopped worrying about the rumors of the boy who stopped Albion’s army, thinking it to be a madman’s palaver.

After all, besides Saito, there were many people missing or killed.

As a result, after returning to the Academy of Magic Louise became severely depressed and hadn’t talked to anyone. As if her mind was somewhere else, she shut herself in the dormitory room and did not go out.

Saito’s fate was also part of the rumors in the Academy. Anyhow, right now Saito was famous in the academy for two things: for being a "legendary familiar" and for being the one that "should be credited for everything".

Montmorency, who also heard these rumors, was worrying about Louise who had shut herself in and had not left her room.

“At the very least I want to comfort. I'll pay her a sympathy visit for now."

“Now you're talking. Montmorency, you are very kind.”

“I am not really kind. You know, until now, though we are in a war… Even though it was a war, I never really fought in a war until just now…”

“Yes.”

“I am like 'water' in so many different ways. I will fight my way ... I only wish I were stronger.”

Through the window, Montmorency looked up at the sky and muttered.

“I can’t allow this sadness to exist. I cannot cure if I feel sorry for myself.”

And so the war between the Holy Republic of Albion and the Tristain-Germania alliance ended with the ringing bells of the Advent Festival.

Due to Saito's sacrifice, all the Allied Forces withdrew safely, while Gallia’s fleet left the alliance and entered the war, blowing up the command base in Rosais with Cromwell, and causing Albion’s army that was stationed there to surrender.

With overwhelming difference in numbers and with the Emperor being blown up, Albion’s army had lost their will to fight. Moreover, the Allied Forces' revolters returned to themselves, as if waking up from a long dream, and went against Albion’s army again. Because of all this confusion, Albion’s army surrendered without a fight.

Gallia’s army settled in Rosais, stopping a war for now to clean up the mess…

Thus a war which lasted for eight months was ended by an active intervention by the kingdom of Gallia.

Two weeks passed since the Holy Republic of Albion's fall…

On the third week of the New Year's, Yara’s month - week of Eolo - the Allied Forces were officially disbanded and the temporary officers from the Academy of Magic students returned to the school one after another.

Those who had military achievements and those who didn’t, returned with pride. They fought in fierce battles, and accomplished their duty even if there were no fabulous military results.

Because Academy of Magic’s students, with a few exceptions, were used as the army’s back-up, there were almost no casualties and no military achievements either.

Due to that, those students that were militarily successful were head-and-shoulders above the rest and their popularity skyrocketed.

So Guiche boasted about his military achievements as well…

Evening…

Driven from Montmorency's room, Guiche, feeling a little down, strode. Not many people walked here, in Vestri Courtyard.

When you think about it… It was here where Saito and I met and dueled, he thought. At that time, Saito kept on standing up no matter how much damage he received.

Next thing that caught his eye was the bath Saito made and a tent next to the artillery tower. When he was driven out by Louise, he set up a tent and kept on living and sleeping there for a while. Guiche also recalled how he and Saito drank all night in there.

That's the Saito burned into his memory…

Somehow, his eyes turned moist. Guiche felt sad. Because he was sad he made so much noise back at the classroom.

Saito. Except Louise, no one believed… that he fought against Albion's army of 70,000 and stopped it. But for a man who stood up even while being hit by my Valkyrie… this may be not so impossible after all.

Guiche scrubbed below his eyes.

"Though just a commoner, you were my friend."

Wiping off his tears, he noticed someone moving inside the tent.

"Saito…?"

However, the one that came out was…

"Verdandi!"

It was a huge mole, Guiche's familiar.

"Where were you…?"

Guiche squat down and began to pat his beloved familiar.

“After all, you also miss him?”

The huge mole rubbed his nose against Guiche. Somehow, his round eyes looked sad.

“I see, so you were sad….”

Guiche held Verdandi in his embrace for a while… then he slowly stood up.

“Saito, I think you are a hero. Therefore there is something I have to do. Verdandi! Make a big pile of soil!”

Verdandi nodded and began to grub up earth with severe power. In front of Guiche the mountain of soil rose.

“I am an earth element user. Therefore I’ll send you a salaam with this soil. I’ll make a huge statue, so that you’ll be remembered.”

Guiche cast a spell upon the pile of soil. Then, the soil turned into clay. Thrusting out both his hands, Guiche started making a statue.

“Saito was a great guy. So he deserves a great statue, at least five meters tall. Because you could not use magic… I will make this statue with my bare hands as well. That’s respect to Saito. Noble’s way of respect. Be happy!”

Though Guiche and Montmorency grieved at heart… The one who mourned the most was Louise.

In her room, Louise was sitting on the bed, hugging her knees. Dressed in usual school attire, she wore a strange looking hat on her head.

It was the sweater she gave as a gift to Saito. It looked similar to a rather avant-garde art piece. Even though no matter how hard she pushed, she couldn't get her head through the collar, she still felt more comfortable when wearing it.

Next to Louise was Saito's notebook computer, his only personal thing. Because there was no power supply, the screen was completely blank.

Louise stared at the computer's black screen. She remembered how, on the first day when Saito came, he showed the screen to her.

It was beautiful.

When thinking so, the back of her eyelids became hot again.

Saito… showed some scenery to me. Though I did not understand it, it was still beautiful and that mysterious scenery made me feel somewhat excited.

One by one, different thoughts, scenes, actions… were revived in her heart.

Louise looked down at the pendant on her neck. Held back tears started rolling down her cheeks.

Saito… he always defended me. Like this pedant hanging on my neck, he was always near, he became my shield.

When I was almost crushed by Fouquet's golem.

When I was almost killed by Wardes.

When I faced a huge battleship.

When Henrietta, who was deceived by the enemy and forgot herself, cast Tornado of Water.

And… when I was ordered to hold back the enemy back till I died…

Saito, with his sword unsheathed, stood in front of me.

Legendary Gandálfr, just as his name suggests, became my shield.

But did I treat Saito kindly?

No, I was always a stubborn, selfish, hard-to-please idiot.

“Idiot.”

Tears were burning.

“I was just caring about myself. Such an ungrateful, selfish, not cute me should have been left and ignored.”

Louise did not try to wipe away the falling tears, and quietly whispered to herself.

“Even though you said that dying for honor was nonsense… you did not come home with me.”

Her blaming words against Saito were now returning back at her. Her own words became a spear that scooped the wound in Louise’s heart deeper.

“Though you said you love me… you left me all alone.”

Louise muttered staring at the black screen.

“Without you, I cannot even fall asleep.”

Hugging her knees, Louise continued to sob.

In the capital of Tristain, in the work room of Tristainia‘s Royal Palace, Henrietta sat on a chair with a discouraged look on her face.

Part of the army revolted in Albion; the deaths of General De Poitiers and Marquis Handenburg, commander of the Germanian army; a complete rout of the army… and a withdrawal request.

When the report came from the Chief of the General Staff Wimpffen, every one in the royal palace, including Henrietta and Mazarin, were confused. Was that a fake report by an enemy? They doubted.

To withdraw or continue to fight? It was Cardinal Mazarin who brought the conference together.

“This is the Royal Palace and not a battlefield,” his words silenced the ministers that did not want to withdraw.

However… The withdrawal became insignificant in the end.

The Gallian fleet that appeared suddenly and forced the Albion army to surrender. After that, not long ago, Gallia sent a special envoy to Tristain, who informed them to attend a conference held to decide Albion’s future...

Though Tristain’s Royal Palace was pleased with Gallia’s attitude, there were no peace treaties with Gallia.

Today was the day when two weeks passed since the invitation for Henrietta to attend the conference which was scheduled in Rosais.

Henrietta took in her hands the letter that had been sent by Gallia’s ambassador.

“Halkeginia’s disturbing turn towards Republicanism has been stopped; Gallia’s Royal government feels that all Halkeginia nations should build up closer relationship with each other from now on…”

And the preamble continued.

However, though words caught her eyes they lost their meaning in her head.

Henrietta’s heart felt like a cave. A deep, cold, dark hole, in which one could fall. Even if you look into it, you still could not see the end - a hollow hole.

Cromwell, whom she hated so much, died. Albion’s noble faction was annihilated.

Therefore, why was there no satisfaction?

“Why?”

She said to no one in particular.

“The noble faction that killed Wales-sama is no more. Men who had cheated me are dead… And?”

Did anything change?

Nothing changed at all.

Henrietta buried her face in her hands. She could not do anything about the overflow of feelings that drowned her like a floodwater.

Though someone knocked against the door… Henrietta was not able to answer. The door opened and when Cardinal Mazarin entered, Henrietta remained sitting under the desk with her face buried.

“Are you tired?”

Mazarin muttered.

As if seeing him for the first time, Henrietta looked up slowly and nodded.

“Yes. But it’s all right.”

“Shouldn’t you be happy? First of all, the war ended. Even though the whole army is broken, even though we only won thanks to unexpected help - a victory is still a victory. No matter how many times we thank Gallia, it would still not be enough.”

“Is that so?” Henrietta said, staring into space.

Mazarin, worried about Henrietta, continued speaking.

“However, we cannot be careless, Your Majesty. We still should be ready for war, despite Gallia’s sudden intervention. Their motives are still unclear.”

“Is that so?” Henrietta answered lifelessly.

Mazarin placed a bunch of papers next to Henrietta’s elbows.

“…Documents?”

“Yes. By all means, these are documents that Her Majesty should have a look at.”

“Can it wait? Right now…”

“No, now. You can’t afford not to look through them.”

“I leave everything to your discretion. Cardinal, you know better. I won’t have to worry…”

“Look through them.”

Henrietta shook her head.

“I am sorry. Honestly, I am tired.”

“Look through them!”

Mazarin repeated his words in a stronger tone. Not used to such determination from a thin middle-aged man, Henrietta took one in her hands.

From top to bottom names were written down.

What do these names mean?

“…this?”

Mazarin said in a stony voice.

“It is the list of names of those that died in action during the war.”

Henrietta became speechless.

“Nobles, commoners, officers, soldiers…regardless of rank, all names are listed."

“Oh…” Henrietta said, coverning her face.

“You Majesty, do you know why they died?”

Henrietta shook her head.

“…I don’t know.”

“You don’t know? No, you do know. They died in the name of Your Majesty and the homeland.”

Henrietta deeply hung her head.

Mazarin spoke in an icy tone.

“To some of our ministers, this was just a ‘war diplomacy’, officers and soldiers just the number figures of loss and gain. It may not be a mistake altogether, but these figures had families, lives and loved ones. But they all believed in something.”

Mazarin jabbed his finger into the paper.

“The King is the one who decides to start a war. You can send officers and their men to death, but you cannot forget them. This list of names you have to honor. This list of names you have to protect.”

Henrietta began to weep.

Crying like a child, she buried her face into Mazarin’s legs.

“How many times will I burn in the flames of hell? Tell me. This sinful repenting queen is at your feet, spokesman of God, Cardinal. Oh, I am honest. During this war my heart was only driven by revenge. I was obsessed with it and did not care even if had to sell my soul to the devil to get revenge. However, even if you sell your soul... there‘s nothing after. Not even regret. Just a chasm. A deep, endless chasm.”

“…”

“I… I did not notice how foolish I was. I have lost myself in love, and brought mages to their deaths, even unleashed a frightening spell at a friend. I did not notice. Even while starting a doubtful war, I did not notice. Though I used dear friends as a means for my revenge, I did not notice. And only when revenge ended… I noticed. I noticed that nothing had changed at all.”

Henrietta muttered, begging for forgiveness.

“Please tell me. What… should I do? If you cut my throat would my crime disappear?”

Mazarin pushed Henrietta away. She looked up like a frightened child.

“I am not the one to judge, Your Majesty. You are not the one to judge as well, Your Majesty. That’s only God’s, in the name of the Founder, majestic prerogative. The burden may be hard, may be heavy, but do not try to throw it off. No matter how long the sleepless night continues, do not forget it. Because they died for Your Majesty and for the homeland. It may be just a royal ornament, but they died for this ornament. Death and crime will never disappear. The sadness will not heal. It will quietly sit behind and watch Your Majesty."

Henrietta’s heart turned stone cold, denying any interference as she read through the list of names… and muttered.

“I never was… to be ruler.”

“There are no unexpected kings.”

Then Mazarin bowed deeply and left the room.

Bereaved, Henrietta was quiet for a while. She was motionless.

Messengers of the night, two moons started to shine and illuminated the room… with much effort, Henrietta looked up.

Through Henrietta’s window… two moon sisters watched.

Tears dried on her cheeks.

“Well… nothing left. Not even tears come.”

After that, Henrietta called the page and asked to bring the Minister of Finance. Once the Minister of Finance ran over, Henrietta blandly reported.

“This bedroom… No, the Royal Palace of the Royal family, sell everything here for money.”

“...Hah?”

“Everything. All right? Leave only small amount of clothes. All furniture, the bed, the desk and the dressing table too…”

Puzzled, the Minister of Finance said,

“Bed? B-But where will Your Majesty sleep?”

“Bring a pile of hay. It will do.”

The Minister of Finance became speechless. A queen sleeping on the floor was unheard of.

“Please give the money that you receive from selling those things to the families of war victims. Nobles, commoners – it does not matter. Distribute it equally.”

“B-But…”

“The treasury is in a difficult state? I know.”

Henrietta removed all of her jewels.

The Minister of Finance eyes were wide open in shock as he was handed the jewels one by one. Upon reaching her wedding finger, Henrietta noticed the Ruby of Wind, Wales's keepsake. She closed her eyes for a moment and then removed and handed it to the finances minister.

“Sell this one as well.”

“Really?”

“Yes. This one as well…”

She pointed at the Founder’s portrait, to which she prayed to during the war. For hundreds, thousands of years, this portrait watched over the royal families.

“But, however…”

“Now, what the homeland needs is not prayers to God but gold. You disagree?”

The Minister of Finance violently shook his head.

But before the man left, Henrietta called him to stop.

“I am sorry. Please come back for a moment.”

“Thank goodness! You snapped out of this!”

Henrietta reached for something from the Minister of Finance's treasury tray.

It was a crown. In their haste, neither of them had noticed it.

“Without it, no one would ever admit someone as foolish as I as a ruler.”

After the Minister of Finance left, grateful that he was not needed anymore, Henrietta began to look through the list of names.

Of course, she could not remember them all.

But she wanted to engrave them firmly in her mind. Their lives and ideals hid behind these names. She thought about begging for forgiveness, but stopped.

By the time she had finished reading through the list, dawn had begun to break.

Henrietta took the last piece in her hand.

And held her breath once she saw the name at the very end.

An unusual sounding name, that she had heard before, was written there.

Chapter Two: Saito's Morning

RING RING RING RING RING RING!... The alarm clock rang, and Saito opened his sleepy eyes.

He slowly climbed out of his bed.

This was Earth’s Japan, Tokyo in his own family’s two-story six-bedroom home. In his own bedroom. In an instant, he had a strange feeling, one that was difficult to explain.

It was his bedroom! But why did he have a sense of unease?

Still half asleep, Saito looked at the cat-like alarm clock: 8:30AM. The sense of unease vanished as he screamed “CRAP!” and flipped out of bed.

Wasn't he nearly late?

Saito leaped down the stairs and reached the first floor, then yelled at his mother who was washing dishes in the kitchen.

“Mother! Why didn’t you wake me up?”

“Don’t I always tell you, you have to get up on your own in the morning?”

In that instant, an overwhelming sense of homesickness nearly ran him over.

Looking at his mother’s back, Saito felt he was seeing a loved one lost long ago. He saw his mother’s shadow everyday, so what was this feeling?

But now was not the time to worry about it; he was almost late for school. Saito flew into the living room, put on the school uniform he left there, and then ran back to the kitchen with his mother: “I'm already late, gotta go mom!” grabbing a piece of toast from the kitchen table, then stuffing it into his mouth like a

mouse, swallowing as he dashed out of the door.

Out of the house and straight into the residential streets.

Saito suddenly froze on the spot.

Mother often complained about the house across the streets and its terrible red walls. Saito took the time to “borrow” a couple fruits from the neighbor’s persimmon tree. Nearby was a vending machine for fruit juice.

The usual, and normal, scene. Although it was an scene he was used to, there was an overwhelming sense of longing, that made everything feel dearer.

This was the third time today he felt this strange.

Saito stood there dumbfounded, unable to come up with a reason for this.

In that moment, someone called out to him from behind.

“Saito-san!”

Saito turned around, only to find a black-haired girl in his school's uniform standing there.

“Siesta!”

There was no mistake, it was really Siesta.

Though she used to be a maid in the Tristain Academy of Magic, she now stood there wearing a school uniform.

Siesta wore the western clothes Saito saw before, giving her a fresh sense of cuteness. Along with the mini-skirt worn by other students, blue western blouse with a white shirt, and knee-length socks.

What was Siesta doing in Tokyo?

Why was she wearing his school’s uniform?

Although he still had some difficult questions to answer, he took care of the first question that came to mind. “Why are you dressed like that?”

Siesta answered Saito's question with a confused look.

“Because Saito-san and I go to the same school, isn’t it normal I wear the same uniform?”

Oh, it was so. Saito nodded in understanding. The way she said it seemed to be correct, but right now Saito’s head was a little fuzzy, so he couldn’t really pinpoint what was wrong.

Siesta ran by, grabbing onto Saito’s arm.

“Wait, wait, wait, wait…”

Siesta’s face turned red, unable to finish her sentence.

“I have been waiting for you for a while… I want to go to school together… so…”

“Oh, is that so? Ok, let’s go together.”

Forget it, she is so cute. Going together shouldn’t be a problem. Saito dismissed the question that came floating into his head.

“Great!” Siesta said smiling and took a step forward. The spring wind flew against her body.

“Oh!” The strong wind lifted her short skirt.

The skirt revealed snow-white flesh, causing Saito to pinch his nose in reflex.

“Why, Siesta, why are you not wearing any underwear?”

Siesta using her hands to hold down her skirt, shamefully replied,

“Because, because I am not one of those noble-born girls, who own those flowery panties…”

“Japan doesn’t have any nobility!”

“That is true…”

That is a really strange answer, Saito thought, feeling the incompatibility.

Everything seemed to make sense, yet it felt as though nothing did…

Just as the two stood there dumbfounded…

Saito was sent flying by a force slamming into him from behind and instantly collapsed on the ground.

The person who knocked him down was a pink-haired girl. She had a piece of toast in her mouth and complained at the same time,

“Late, late, I am late!”

The young girl continued to complain then turned around, stomping Saito several more times with her foot.

“You! You!”

Saito desperately tried to get up.

“Ah, late, really late!!”

The young girl swang her foot again, this time aiming for Saito’s face; Saito collapsed again with a yelp.

“Miss Vallière!”

Siesta yelled.

“Ah… late, I said we are late!”

The girl named Vallière continued to scream "late", yet at the same time danced on Saito’s fallen body.

Saito lying on the ground, shouted loudly, “If you know you are late, then stop dancing on my body!”

With that shout, the tiny pink-haired girl stopped. With her arms around her chest, she stared at Saito and asked,

“Where were you staring? Your face is red!” There was a sense of unease in her voice as she asked.

This young lady wore the same style of uniform as Siesta’s - Saito’s school uniform. But the way she wore it was different. She kept her tux’s buttons left open, and kept the tie loose, which made her appear to be very loose herself. But that pink hair and those tea-colored eyes were indeed Louise.

“Why are you wearing your clothes like that?”

But Louise didn’t even seem to notice Saito’s question.

“Where were you looking? Speak!”

“It has nothing to do with you!” Just as Saito finished, he was rewarded with Louise’s foot in his face.

“Of course it has to do with me! You are my familiar, so no matter what happens you are only allowed to look at me! If you look at other people, I will teach you a lesson!”

Louise angrily stared at Siesta.

“So, so, so when you go stare at the big-breasted maid, it means serious punishment! Do you understand?”

“What are you joking about?” Saito yelled. He jumped up and grabbed Louise’s shoulder.

“Eh…” Louise yelped sharply as she collapsed on the ground, and Saito landed on top of her, his eyes transfixed on her face.

“You, what are you doing? …You, you plan to attack your master?”

“Correct.”

“Don’t you dare doing anything! I am a noble, you are a commoner!”

“Noble princesses wouldn’t dress like this!”

Yelled Saito pointing at Louise’s loose socks.

“What, what’s the matter? What I wear is my own business! You are only a familiar, mind your own business!”

“What familiar? What nobility? What Master? It is not same here! Because we are in Japan!”

“Don’t talk nonsense!” Louise yelled raging. Saito restrained the raging Louise and looked into her burning eyes.

“You… wanted this to happen, right?”

Though words came from his mouth, they did not seem to be his. Even though he talked… it felt as if he was watching a movie about other characters.

“…Eh?”

“You wanted to be pushed down by me, didn’t you? That’s why you wore that black cat costume. For me to push you down. Right? Speak up. Heeey, speak up!”

These words have been said some time ago, strangely, Saito thought calmly, while shouting.

Then the girl's cheeks turned pink, like the color of her hair. She turned her head and looked the other way.

“D-don’t be s-silly. Who wanted to be pushed down? S-stop joking, let me go in this instant or I’ll kick you.”

“Then kick.”

Hearing such strong words, Louise bit her lip.

“D-don’t anger me….” She said in a feeble voice.

“Well then, itadakimasu.” He nodded seriously and started to unfasten the shirt at her knolls. *I did this before*, he thought. Then his head was hit with the frying-pan by Siesta who stood behind.

“Auch!”

“This is the middle of the road. It’s embarrassing, please stop.”

“Frying-pan, where…”

“I carry it to cook.”

“Butt out!” Louise screamed rudely at Siesta. Siesta turned to Louise.

“Why are you so mad, even though I helped you? Then all these words about ‘anger’ must be a lie. It’s not your real intention. You wanted to be pushed down after all.“

“L-lies! Maids should be silent and do the laundry!”

“I would do the laundry if you would lend me the washboard.”

“Haah? I don’t have a washboard!”

“Not true. You have a splendid one over there.”

She pointed at Louise’s chest. Louise let out a penetrating scream.

“Keeeeeeeeeeee!”

“Wash with plain chest♪ With bubbles wash♪ Scrub scrub scrub♪”

Louise jumped at Siesta's singing.

“Whaaat! Big breasts are all that you have, maid! Flirting with men is all that you think about! Not even wearing underwear!”

“Aren’t you the same! You always think about how to get laid! Wearing next to nothing! Ridiculous noble! Always eagerly awaiting with shiny eyes to be pushed down by Saito-san! Don’t you have any shame?!”

"What! Undeveloped! Stupid maid!" The quarrel turned into a cat fight between the two. Skirts fluttering, claws spread, gripping each others hair, they were rolling on the ground like two raging chickens.

“S-stop…” Saito muttered, though the pair were not listening at all.

Then... A black limousine drove up.

The door at the driver's side opened and Mazarin, dressed up in white gloves and a black suit, stepped out. When Mazarin opened the door at the back seat, he bowed reverently.

Henrietta appeared, in a white dress. She wore a brimless hat decorated with flowers. Her dress was befitting more of a young lass than princess. She held an elegant handbag at her side.

Henrietta ran up to Saito and offered her hand.

“You stopped an army of 70,000.”

“Yes.” Saito replied boldly.

“You were truly unstoppable. Aaah, you are a savior of Tristain. Though this useless queen cannot do anything, I can’t leave such loyalty unrewarded. Well, kiss this hand.”

Saito took the hand and pressed it to his lips, next, Henrietta wrapped her arms around Saito’s neck.

“P-Princess?”

“Call me Ann. Next, on the lips, for compassion.”

Flustered Henrietta embraced Saito's head closely and puckered up her lips.

Not good, Saito thought and in an instant heard growls.

“What are you doing to the Princess?!”

“Always nobles! You always prefer them! It’s impossible for a village girl to be noticed!”

Saito, knowing very well what it meant to become Louise’s and Siesta’s target, quickly shook off Henrietta’s arms and ran away.

“Wait! Let’s continue the evening from the cheap hotel!”

Henrietta shouted.

“Continue what from the cheap hotel?! What?!”

“What did you do in there! Surely you wore weird clothes again!”

Siesta and Louise ran after him shouting.

While he was trying to escape, an American bike appeared out of the corner. Scarron and Jessica were sitting on it, all dressed up in tight leather clothes.

Saito leaped over the pair’s motorcycle and fell.

Jessica jumped out of the bike's sidecar and looked down at the sprawled Saito.

“Stop being useless. Quickly, help me to sell this oil."

“Y-you…”

“Huh? Not energetic? Then how about this to motivate you?”

She threw him a mischievous glance and through the crevice of her leather jacket led Saito’s hand into the valley of her well-developed bosom.

Now he was in a trouble.

“W-wait a second!”

“Wait for what?” Jessica said in an amorous voice that tickles man’s heart, and watched him through sparkling eyes.

“You're a girl right? So don’t act like this…”

But Jessica’s eyes made Saito hold his breath…

“That brunette again!”

“My cousin! What the?!”

Saito left Jessica and began to run again. He escaped to Main Street, and while elbowing his way through the crowd, he knocked against someone.

“S-sorry.”

He knocked against a woman with long pink hair. She wore a thin purple cardigan and was holding a leash to which many dogs were connected.

Bark. Bark bark. Bark bark bark.

The dogs drew closer to Saito.

“Dog! Many dogs! Good doggies! Uwaa! Waawaa!”

“Huh, they seem to like you a lot.”

He knew that woman by sight. She was part of Louise’s family.

The gentle aura around this woman with long pink hair.

She pressed her hand to her mouth, trying to suppress a giggle. This woman was Cattleya, Louise’s elder sister. Cattleya’s dogs nuzzled against Saito.

“Ah! Hey! Stop! Stop it!”

Sniff sniff, bark bark, sniff sniff, bark bark.

“Whaaa! Now between dogs! Don’t you match well! Adorable! What! What are you doing to my big sister!”

Louise ran up shouting.

“Even with dogs! I can’t allow it!”

Siesta shouted.

Both had a terrible look on their faces. If he was caught by those two, his life would be in danger. But because of the leaning dogs he could not do anything.

“You perverted dog!”

The moment when Louise shouted, jumping at him… Saito was lifted in the air.

“F-flying?”

Saito looked up, and found himself caught by a wind dragon. Sitting on the drake was a blue-haired girl. They turned out to be Tabitha and her familiar, which was carrying Saito on its back.

For some reason, Tabitha was wearing an airplane stewardess outfit. A young girl like Tabitha wearing a stewardess dress, appeared very, very strange. Like a gag in a story.

Even though Tabitha was dressed like this she still remained focused on her book.

“What, what the… Oh, it is you… never mind, thank you for saving me.”

Saito expressed his gratitude, feeling massive relief.

But Tabitha remained the same as a ever, without making a sound.

Saito remained silent for a moment too, but everything became even more awkward, so he decided to find a topic to chat about, and finally saw Tabitha’s book.

“You know I always wondered… what kind of books are you always reading?”

Tabitha refused to answer.

Without any other method, Saito decided to go behind her and peek at the book. When he saw the title, he could not stop laughing: “Ah? Romance Technique - How to make boys like you… you… it is this kind of book?? Ahahahaha! You interested in this kind of stuff?"

Tabitha, without replying, continued to leaf through the book. Her eyes did not reveal a sliver of emotion, so it was impossible to tell if she was mad or embarrassed.

“That kind of thing, no matter how many books you read, is useless. First you have to learn how to talk to a boy. Because the purpose of your heart is important.” Saito appeared to be very knowledgeable about the matter and added: “No matter what, a person like you who never talks, is in an impossible situation.”

Saito lightly patted Tabitha’s head, and Tabitha just nodded her head toward his hand.

“Right, use me as an model, let’s practice talking.”

The blue-haired girl silently stared at Saito’s face. No matter how hard he tried, nothing was coming out of Tabitha’s mouth.

“Hey, what are you planning? If it's like this you will never find a boyfriend! Come, come on! You should know more words than spells, come on! Say something!”

He remained half joking, shaking the little girl’s head left and right. In that moment, Tabitha stood up.

“I know it.”

“Oh?”

Tabitha remained expressionless, but like a machine-gun she spat out a string of words:

“Can’t find a boyfriend? Mind your own business! Stuck between the maid and the boob-less mage, you have no right to talk about me. Someone like you, all you need to see is the princess, the village girl or elder sister with big breasts and you instantly have that “look”, really a mess. Then you will say ‘no no, I can’t do this kind of thing, because I am from another world, so I cannot support your feelings.’ But while you talk, your body doesn’t react the same way.”

“You, You,” Saito’s head became red as a tomato.

“A person like you would seriously annoy them both, you make them want to come after you with violence.”

Saito looked at Tabitha’s height and replied, “You, you little kid, don’t talk so spirited like that.”

The girl’s was a head shorter than Louise, but Tabitha’s expression remained unchanged, and added, “Who is a kid? You are the real kid! A brainless person like you who tries to step into two ships with one foot, you are ten years too

early!”

"Gya!"

Saito suddenly curled into a ball aboard the wind dragon. He had apparently been kicked in the groin by Tabitha. Then Tabitha followed it with a straight kick to Saito’s face.

“I should keep you as a pet.”

“Stop joking!”

“What are you talking about? Aren't you very happy? You like it, don't you? When a loli dominates you. It is written all over your face!”

“You, you!”

Saito sprang to his feet, grabbing Tabitha’s shoulder. Then the two’s gaze met. In this moment, Tabitha’s cheeks turned red and she turned her face away. Her change made Saito’s heart leap.

“How did you manage to show emotion like that?”

But Tabitha’s next attack knocked Saito beyond belief:

“Please…”

“Please?”

“Please be gentle with me.”

Please, please be gentle?! You, you, Saito looked like an air-less goldfish with his mouth opening and closing.

The next offensive completely ripped his command center open.

“Ki, Ki…”

“Ki?"

“Kissing, teach me.”

What is she talking about? Saito was completely unable to understand.

But, it was really cute.

Because she was always expressionless, such an attack surprised Saito. Yet it wasn’t an unpleasant surprise. It was a so-called pleasant surprise. The surprise, joy, and the excitement somehow almost made Saito faint. No, it wasn’t "somehow".

On closer inspection, Tabitha had beautiful snow-white skin. Her blue eyes were like sapphires. Those blue lakes, still young, were very charming and made Saito’s heart throb. Like Louise, she had those noble, elegant features… Though he did not notice before because he thought her to be too young, she was definitely beautiful…

What the heck I am thinking about - she’s still a child, he thought shaking his head.

“F-foolishness, your father would be angry at me if he caught me kissing you!"

Not flinching, Tabitha pushed her lips out.

“Onii-chan…”

Foul play! On a wind dragon, writhing in big conflict, Saito heard roaring from behind. When he turned around, he saw the Zero Fighter flying.

“Wha-!”

Within the cockpit he could see Louise’s and Siesta’s faces.

“How do you know how to fly it?!” He yelled.

“I learned it from my grandfather!” Siesta shouted.

He wondered how he could hear her voice through loudly roaring engine, and soon, undoubtedly, he heard Louise’s angry voice.

“Now you are going after a child who is even smaller than me! You love anyone - big or small! Either way will do! You are the worst!”

Don! Don! DoDo! The Zero Fighter's wings trembled.

How can they shoot twenty-millimeter bullets when they're supposed to be out of ammo?

He thought, when a jar of wine flew at him.

“Have a drink!” came Siesta’s drunken voice.

She was drunk while piloting the airplane. Saito was terrified.

“No, fly the plane.”

He muttered, before getting hit by a jar. It hurt!

Saito shouted impatiently.

“Tabitha, evade! Speed the wind dragon up to run away from the Zero Fighter!”

“Tabitha? I am Kirche, Darling.”

Somehow Tabitha turned into Kirche. Moreover, only a few seashells were covering her most important body parts.

“Aah! Quickly, get away from me! We will get killed! Flying too fast!"

“It can’t fly.”

“Isn’t this a wind dragon?!”

“Nope, my salamander, Flame-chan.”

Unnoticed by Saito, it was indeed Kirche’s salamander Flame.

“Whaat?!!”

The salamander went down like a rock. Saito tried to grab Derflinger. *Using my Gandálfr's power, I’ll jump onto the Zero Fighter and save myself!*

“Awa! Why doesn't my body feel lighter?!”

Looking at his left hand, he saw the runes disappear.

“Wa! Uwa! Waah!”

He steadily approached the ground.

“Falling! Falling! N? What’s this?!”

He saw something.

Light.

“…it shines. Gold?”

On the moment of the crash, dazzled, Saito was wrapped up by the golden light.

“Falling!”

Screamed Saito, waking up.

He was breathing heavily for a while, before muttering to himself.

“A dream…”

Fuzzy-headed, he reviewed the clattery drama.

He was chased by Siesta and Louise, and was urged by Henrietta, Jessica, dogs and Tabitha – what an absurd hubbub and mess.

If it’s not a dream then why were Louise and Siesta in school uniforms from

Saito's Japan or Tabitha dressed up as stewardess? But why would I be having such dream…

"Such strong desire, I…" he writhed in embarrassment for a moment. He grew worried – what if anyone saw him now? He looked around in fear.

"Uh."

Indeed, there was an audience.

In front of Saito's eyes, there were faces of children watching him.

There were various faces - big and small, boys and girls. Golden hair, red hair, brunette…, there were various other hair colors too. Some were hesitant, embarrassed, relieved or worried watching Saito's suspicious behavior. Though the children clothes were a little dirty, their eyes sparkled.

A single boy with blond hair, leaned towards Saito and quietly looked into his face.

"Well… did you see me just now?" Saito asked, for some reason the boy jumped back in fear.

"Weird person! Suspicious person!" he ran away shouting.

"H-hey… it's a misunderstanding, misunderstanding!"

"Freak! Someone people should avoid!"

Others joined in.

"Wa-wait a minute! I am not a strange person!"

However, Saito's excuse didn't reach them, and all of the children rushed out of the room like lightning.

"Wha-what… they. A while ago, I was having this embarrassing dream… Anyway, where am I?"

Saito looked around the room where he was in.

It was a cozy room. A window on one side of the bed, and a door on the other side. A small round table was placed in the center of the room, two wooden chairs near it.

Though the bed that Saito slept in was coarse, it was clean, with white sheets and a soft blanket pulled over.

“Must be some kind of inn… But, why am I here… I mean. I was heavily injured…”

Saito in a hurry looked down at his body. He was covered with bandages. At that time, in a fierce battle, he was definitely driven to the point of death.

So.

I… let Louise and others leave and went against 70,000 alone. He shuddered remembering the fierce battle.

After he clashed with the 70,000 army, following Derflinger’s advice he aimed at the commanders.

He attacked a fair amount of mages, but due to spell hits, he started loosing consciousness. Starting to stagger, he saw a general surrounded by mages and knights, and leaped at him.

After that, he couldn't remember anything…

“…Anyway, seems like I survived.”

Feeling relieved, Saito whispered in a discouraged voice.

At the same time with a relief, various doubts crept in.

Spell arrows and fireballs hit him, or was it, but there were no deep wounds. Then an explosion hit at close range, and he remembered his left-hand becoming like a charcoal. It was nothing. He felt blood running out in streams from his body. There was a gaping wound in his belly. His bones were broken like sticks and his inner organs torn. In other words, he was close to death.

Yet, looking at my body now…

The vicious burns on his left arm had disappeared, the pink skin showing through the cracks between the bandages. The body wounds did not hurt for the time being either.

Saito looked doubtful.

What on earth happened to my body?

“Well, it’s a wizard world after all, so some miracles do happen…” showing his inborn optimism, Saito said to himself.

For now, the only thing known was that he "survived", and other things did not matter all that much. Once feeling relieved, he was reminded of other things.

That’s right, there are more important concerns than my body.

My clash with the army of 70,000…

Were the enemy forces confused enough?

Did it buy enough time for our allies to withdraw?

Did Louise and everyone else escape safely?

“Uuuh… what’s true? Now I’ll worry. Aaah, I’ll ask Derf.”

Saito looked around, searching for Derflinger.

However, the wise sword was nowhere to be found in the room. *I’ll look for him, I cannot learn anything this way,* Saito thought and tried to stand up…

“Auch!”

A frog-like voice leaked from his throat.

The acute cramping pain pierced through his sides, feet, arms, ankles and neck. The pain covered his whole body and did not stop, making Saito see black and white. Though his life was saved, he still might be badly injured.

That fierce battle that felt like a dream since he woke up was now rapidly gaining real outlines. Saito shook and started to tremble. Even though he tried to

suppress it, it didn’t stop.

One wrong step and he would have been dead. He had definitely escaped death by a hair.

Until the trembling settled, he decided to lie back in bed.

“But… I may still be asleep.”

He needed to confirm it.

I want to know precisely how I was brought back to life.

Therefore, he tried to get up many times.

Tch! Ouch! He shouted, whenever he tried to stand up he was instantly taken over by pain…

“You should not move.”

From the door where the children ran to… a smooth smell flowed and a cool, sweet voice spoke.

Ah, when he turned towards the open door, he saw a girl, with fair, river-like flowing hair, standing.

Chapter Three: The Golden Elf

The first thought that crossed Saito’s mind after seeing the girl was…

Golden light.

During the dream before, he had seen the golden light at the end.

That light became reality, blinding Saito’s eyes.

He hastily squinted. Once he got used to it, he saw that she wasn't really shining. However, the girl's presence was so strong it felt like an illusory light.

The girl who showed up was beautiful. No, the word beautiful was too trite, she had a divine, pretty face. When she moved, one wanted to kneel down and worship her.

“Hada, wada, howada” For the time being Saito had trouble finding any words.

“What's wrong?” The girl was obviously confused enough to need to ask the question.

“No-that-nothing-this.”

The girl looked hesitant for a moment. Then, after deciding something, took a deep breath and approached Saito. She wore a green, crude, short, one-piece dress, but rather than damaging her beauty it complimented her nicely. Slender lovely legs ran down her short skirt with white sandals framing her pretty feet.

That simple attire accentuated her beauty and created a friendly atmosphere.

Upon nearing Saito the girl laughed forcibly. She obviously tried hard to make him comfortable. And her accompanying smile didn't radiated beauty but kindness.

“Thank goodness. Because you slept for two weeks… I was worried that you might not awaken.”

“Did I sleep for that long?” Although he was surprised that he slept for two weeks, the girl’s beauty was even more shocking.

It looked as if she was covered with light since her long golden hair on all sides of her, like a waving golden sea, reflected sunlight falling from the window, and the light danced on her face.

It was like a computer animation showing the face with a perfect outline and silhouette. Beautiful but it made one nervous at the same time. Such a beautiful person without any noticeable flaws.

And pointed ears peeped through crevices of her golden hair.

Ears like that are quite unusual, he thought while trying to move, eliciting an incomparably acute pain through his side. Until now he had never felt such debilitating pain. But that pain made him feel "alive". *I am not dead, I feel alive,* thought Saito while trembling.

Relief filled Saito the same way wilted flowers absorbed water. He was safe for now and was he swept with a torrent of emotions.

“I see… I'm alive…”

Gradually he was moved to tears. *I am alive,*. With a thought like that, even the aching wounds on his body felt near and dear.

Teary-eyed Saito muttered. “Ah, if it hurts it means I am alive.”

Seeing that…

“W-well… are the bandages too tight?” Blinking her clear, big, green eyes, the girl reached for Saito.

After confirming his well being, the girl's beauty felt more real and made Saito’s heart tremble.

Oh, if I were to touch someone as beautiful as her, I would certainly receive

heaven's punishment.

Saito immediately retracted. He felt like a simpleton .

The girl opened her eyes wide as she noticed that an ear was peeping from the crevice of her hair and hurriedly covered it with both hands. In an instant her cheeks were flushed pink.

“S-sorry.”

“Eh?”

“But don’t worry. I won’t do any harm.”

Saito stared blankly at her. It seemed that Saito’s retreat was mistaken for fright. An unexpected misunderstanding. Saito lost his nerve only because of her beauty, not because of fright.

“No no! That, I am not afraid. But because of your b-b-bb…”

“Bb?”

“Beauty, well…”

Saying that Saito colored up. He was not used to saying "You are beautiful" to a girl.

She made a surprised face.

“Beauty?”

“Y-yes.”

“You think so even after you saw my ears?” She removed her hands from her ears.

“Yes.”

Suspicious, Saito nodded. Certainly, pointed ears were unusual. However, in Halkeginia with its orcs, dragons, water spirits, there lived many strange beings. At this point, pointed ears did not surprise him as much. *Well, I guess there are*

people who would not think so.

“…really, you are not shocked? Not scared?” She watched Saito with a doubtful face.

“Really, I am not shocked nor scared. Why would I be afraid? Why do you need to ask? Besides, there are a lot more scary things. Like dragons and trolls.”

The girl was relieved, “It’s unusual for a human to not be afraid of an elf.”

“Elf?”

Saito had heard the name. He delved to the bottom of his memory and recalled it. Well it was certainly mentioned in some talks. This was the name of those who lived in the "east". According to the rumors they were vicious, and lived on bad terms with humans in a holy land.

He did think them to be terrible, but the girl in front of him was far from that.

“Yes, elf. And I am ‘mixed’ one at that…” This the girl muttered with a touch of self-hatred. Thereupon, a shadow covered her porcelain features and melancholy took over her face.

Confused for a moment… Saito had second thoughts.

Hey Saito, it's not time to appreciate the pretty girl.

Isn't there anything else for you to worry about?

How did I survive?

What happened to the war?

Louise?

Siesta?

Everyone?

However, there was something else to do before that. He’d ask later.

Saito said while pointing at the bandages around his body,“Did you help me?”

“Yes," the girl nodded.

“I see… Thank you. Honestly, thank you.” Saito thanked her many times. Even so, it wasn't enough to express his gratitude.

The girl smiled shyly.

Somehow, she seemed to be embarrassed and dodged Saito’s words. Despite her beauty, she seemed to lose her composure easily.

Though this girl's behavior was naturally cute, Saito endured. Now wasn’t the time to get love-struck. There were a lot of things that he wanted to hear first.

But... something was amiss.

Wasn’t it a little strange?

She helped me?

Hey hey, wasn’t he battling against an army of 70,000?

From the look of it, the girl wore village clothes. So how was she able to help him in the middle of the large army?

Gradually, suspicion built in Saito’s mind.

Then, her beauty, and the atmosphere surrounding her…

What if this elf woman was an enemy?

She tried to make me feel relieved to draw out some information…

When you think about it, this beautiful girl in front of me could really be an enemy’s trap. In movies and anime, the spies were usually beautiful women.

Moreover, after coming to this world and meeting Louise, Saito realized one the truth.

What looks cute may not be so from the inside.

Such was the truth. And from the evidence that his body obtained – it was unshakable truth.

With such a truth, he became more suspicious of the girl.

“Fufufu…”

“What's wrong?”

Saito, cleared his throat, and asked in an calm voice.

“I really want to express my gratitude for helping me, however, there’s one thing I want to know.”

“Please.”

“Where did you find me?”

“You were lying in the forest so I brought you here.”

Lying in the forest?

Didn’t I fall, surrounded by a large army?

What forest?

Saito narrowed his eyes and watched the girl suspiciously.

Due to this, the atmosphere started to feel awkward…

“W-well, I’ll bring you food.”

Saying that, the girl tried to leave. Saito gripped her arm.

“Where have you put my sword?”

“Aah, that sword is yours? I do not know but he was making noise. I thought that it was better to not wake you up, so I placed him in the room on the other side….

Saito puckered up his eyebrows. He recalled words from an old detective drama. The beauty of a rose has thorns. And in the end, the beautiful woman was a

criminal. *Damn,* and said aloud,

“There must be a reason for Derf to be so loud.”

“Even if you say that, there must be a reason…”

She said in an embarrassed voice. Then, seeing Saito clasping her hand, the girl shamefully bit her lip.

“W-well… please, that, hand…”

The girl struggled to shake off Saito's hand. However, Saito didn't let go. Frowning in pain, he drew the girl's slender form to himself. The blush on girl's cheeks increased even more.

“Umm… let go… please.”

“Tell me the truth.”

But Saito was completely lost in the role of the great detective hunting down a criminal. A very bothering character. Even an encounter with death could not fix such a painful personality.

“You are from the Albion army. Say it, A-L-B-I-O-N.”

“N-no. I am not related to Albion nor to an army.”

With frightened face, girl shook her head. However, Saito’s detective feelings sense was completely convinced that she was part of the Albion army.

“Then how I was 'lying in the forest'? I lost consciousness in the middle of an enemy army! So there!”

“I-I do not know how…”

“Spit it out!”

“Ah..”

Saito pulled on the girl making her lose the balance. Then she fell down on Saito’s thigh.

“Spit it out! S-eh?”

In an instant, Saito's face became pale.

Something big and soft crashed against his thigh.

Detective doubts about the girl where blown from his head in an instant, and now other doubt swelled up in his mind.

"Hey", Saito asked.

What object crashed against my thigh just now?

…Breasts?

It should be breasts.

However… it cannot be breasts. Surely, there cannot be such breast size. So, it isn’t.

Yet what would be normal breasts like? Saito imagined cooking. Big, soft bread. Stuffed animal. And yes - rounded square cushion.

Then what.

Still, even if these were breasts, there were physical laws that breasts could not disregard.

By accident he caught her profile with his eyes. She was crimson. From shame and tension she seemed to not to be able to talk any more. Because of Saito’s grip on her arm she could not stand up. Still, bravely, the girl struggled trying to stand up.

Something hard stuck in Saito’s throat.

T-this especially. I, aah, I…

These soft, heavy objects on his thigh changed shape while moving.

Saito, with his mouth agape, watched the girl. Felt like his heart valves were breaking, almost making blood spout from his nose. His heart was beating like a drum, and the enthusiasm of life was coming back to Saito.

As he watched the pointed ear which peeped from the crevice of her thin golden hair… three letters sparked in Saito’s head

T. B. R.

Or in other words…

The Bust Revolution.

Indeed… this was a revolutionary breast size.

When compared to the body lines, the size looked even bigger. This elf girl’s body was slender. He could see that when her body fell. Her ankles and arms were thin. Waist, neck – all were thin…only her breasts were different. Her breasts caused the revolt within this body.

If there was a law concerning breast size, this would earn a life sentence. No, the death penalty. At least if Louise were a judge, it would be the death penalty.

Aaah, because she wore voluminous clothes he had not realized. Aaah, because of her delicate arms, his mind had unconsciously applied that to the whole body. Aah aaah, for me, such a large breast size was all honesty.

“Ah, ya…ha, n.”

The girl let out sounds while struggling. This rascal, though her whole body is slender, why are the breasts so strange? Could it be that her breasts gathered all her nourishment, could it? *I learned one day in science class about Mendelian inheritance... this miracle could be explained by the laws of dominant inheritance...*

His brains boiled, while thinking.

“Big sister is telling the truth!”

“Don’t do anything to Tiffa nee-chan!”

“Stop doing weird things to big sister!”

Children suddenly rushed into Saito’s room. Seems like the children were watching them from the open door.

“Remove your hands from Tiffania onee-chan!”

Tiffania – seemed to be the name of this beautiful elf girl. Children started hitting Saito, who was grasping her arm.

“Eh! No! This! Different! Children, it’s different!”

Though Saito tried to make excuses… the children's power was too strong, even though these kids a little while ago were frightened by the weird stranger.

With potential of huge breasts that cannot be expressed in a single phrase, this delicate elf girl, seemed to be the children's treasure.

“You don't understand! This person’s breasts are too strange! Therefore I was surprised! It’s different! I was just surprised, that’s why I attacked!”

“Not different! It looked strange no matter what!”

It was justifiable.

“Ruffian! Be gone!”

“Wait! I’m not bad! That! Gyaa!”

“Eat this!” the girl with short blond hair hit his head severely with the frying-pan. *Come to think of it, I was hit with the frying-pan in the dream as well*, came the trivial thought, before Saito started a journey to the unconscious world again.

While rubbing his aching head, Saito woke up again.

Tiffania opened the door and entered. Even after seeing again, she was beautiful. The color of her hair was bright and sparkling with gold and white, tres bien indeed, he thought.

She was embarrassed.

“Just a while ago, s-sorry for the children… because they believed… that you were doing strange things.”

Tiffania was carrying the heavy Derflinger in her arms. Unsho, yokkorasho[1] – panting, she put strained expression that didn’t suit her face and leaned it against the bed.

“Derf!”

“Yoo, partner… Are you finally awake? I'm so glad, I'm so glad.”

Derflinger explained what happened after Saito fainted.

How he fell immediately before attacking the general.

And how Derflinger using "absorbed amount of magic to move Gandálfr" ability ran away to the forest.

“But, I was at a loss. And sad because you died. Your heart stopped too. I was fed up with making friends and then losing them, what kind of legendary Derf I am.”

“Well, I survived…”

Saito, took a long look at himself again.

“Partner."

“Hold your tongue! Why haven’t you told me that you have such an ability?”

“I had forgotten… I am rather forgetful. But partner’s death made me sad.

Partner is partner after all. No, not a legend anymore, but partner is partner…”

He said in an inarticulate way, but Saito was not listening to Derflinger’s whining already.

Ignoring his aching body, he bowed to Tiffania.

“I'm really sorry! I… Though you helped me, I suspected you to take part in an enemy trap...”

“Eh? It’s all right. That, umm, don’t worry.”

Tiffania muttered, looking embarrassed.

“But, to heal such injury…”

Once again, the inborn curiosity raised it’s head. Saito asked anxiously.

“If you can, could you tell me? What magic you used to heal me when I was in a near death state?”

Tiffania, hesitating whether to say or not… revealed a ring.

It was an old ring, only a dull silver plinth.

In that silver base for the fourth finger ring - there must have been a stone before.

“I was cured by this ring?”

Tiffania nodded with a stern face.

“Such an incredible ring! To cure such a severe injury! If you have it, people won‘t die from injuries or diseases!”

Tiffania shook her head.

“That’s impossible.”

“What?” Saito was bewildered. Derflinger explained.

“Ancient Magic. Elf treasure, isn’t it? The girl is half-elf.”

Tiffania was surprised.

“How do I know it? Anyhow, I lived very long, even though my memory is bad.”

“So… I'll tell you. As Sword-san said the 'Ancient Magic' with water power was placed into this ring. However, I do not know the name of it... it was given as keepsake from my dying mother.“

“Your mother was an elf?”

Tiffania nodded.

"I see. You have some hidden reasons of your own, right? Ah, never mind, I don't plan on asking for the details anyway.....However, since there is only the bezel of the ring left, does this mean that the 'magical power' within it has been used up?"

"Exactly. There was a magical gem containing 'Water Magic' embedded here before, but as the magic was exhausted, the gem just dissolved.....That's why there is only the bezel of the ring left. Anyway, this marks the end of the ring's power here. So, please don't get hurt that seriously again, because I can't heal you anymore."

Saito was touched to the bottom of his heart. Though he didn’t understand well, somehow an important keepsake from her mother was used and he was cured.

“Tiffania-san… right?”

“Tiffania it is. Though, if it is too hard to call me that, you can call me Tifa.”

Tiffania said, giving a smile that was the embodiment of beauty. Hard to call, indeed.

“Tifa then. Really really, that… Let me express my greatest gratitude… Though it was such an important ring, to cure me…”

“Eh? It’s all right, it’s all right! Tools are there to be used after all!”

Tiffania said in panic.

“Indeed…”

Saito looked up.

“I would like to thank you, but I do not have anything to give but the little 'power' I have!”

“Partner.”

In an embarrassed tone, Derflinger muttered. Disregarding him Saito continued.

“I cannot tell the details, but I can use any weapon! Therefore, please tell me when you are in trouble! For instance if a fierce animal or monster attacks the village at night…”

Saito, on the bed, clasped Tiffania's hand.

“F-for now…”

Tiffania muttered, giving a wry smile.

“You’ll see! Weapon! Grab! And the runes on my left hand start to shine! Here!”

Saito reached for Derflinger, who had been leaning against the bed and gripped him.

“Ah, partner…”

For some reason Derflinger’s voice sounded embarrassed.

“Hey! When I grip the sword this way, the runes on my left hand… T-that?”

Saito stared blankly. Though Derflinger was gripped, nothing shone. Usually, the runes on his left hand shined and his body felt light, as if growing a pair of wings… yet, it didn’t lighten.

“W-what’s wrong?”

In panic, Saito watched his left hand, with his mouth widely agape.

“Rururu…”

“See, partner? I told you so. Not legendary anymore, but partner is a partner. But we are still same old, right? Friends, right? Therefore do not worry. Because I am still your partner. Thu-…”

Derflinger’s words were interrupted,

“What’s with the runes?!”

Saito screamed.

And so…

The sign of Gandálfr disappeared without a trace.

Chapter Four: The Visit of the Priest

One week after the day Saito woke up…

One wind dragon landed on the courtyard of the Tristain Academy of Magic.

All the students, who were chatting in the courtyard, turned around.

Upon seeing the boy on the dragon's back, a sigh escaped from the schoolgirls' chests.

"Look! What beautiful hair!"

"Look there!"

On seeing the boy's eyes, the schoolgirls became frightened in an instant. The colors of the right and left eyes were different.

"'Moon eyes'."

One girl muttered.

Eyes with different right and left colors were called 'Moon eyes', following the two moons of Tristain. In the provinces, where the superstitions were strong, it was believed that such person was evil and was despised by everyone.

However… they still absent-mindedly watched the beautiful boy get off the dragon.

"Hyaa… is he a noble from some country? He's like a fairy!"

Priest of Romalia - Julio Cesar.

The schoolgirls rambled on – "Kyaa Kyaa".

Julio, ignoring the commotion, jumped down to the ground from his wind dragon’s back….

Thump.

He hit the ground with his head.

Schoolgirls, dumbfounded, looked at each other, and ran up to Julio.

“Are you… all right?”

Julio laughed with a smile, while laying on the ground. What a charming smile – all schoolgirls were swayed in an instant.

“The soil is on your face… P-please use this…” one girl gave a handkerchief to Julio, making the other girls stir as well.

“H-here use mine!”

“My handkerchief has a nice smell to it!”

“I’m alright.”

“Haah! The soil doesn’t suit your elegant features!”

“It’s good. Just about.”

“But…”

“I still haven’t washed my face after the war. That’s why it’s dirty.”

Julio waved off.

“For three weeks? Seriously!”

“Do you really hate washing your face that much?”

Laughter echoed.

“That’s not it. I just cannot make a lady's handkerchief dirty.”

He stood up and bowed.

“Nooo! Stop joking!”

Girls shouted joyfully.

The boys sourly watched the schoolgirls swoon. One schoolboy, with a challenging smile, approached Julio.

One girl shouted.

“Pelisson-sama!”

Third-year Pelisson was a ladykiller of the Tristain Academy of Magic. Though he had a pretty face like an ancient sculpture, he lacked charm. He was jealous when a popular person showed up suddenly, and could not stomach it.

Pelisson crossed his arms and glared at Julio and noticed a Holy Saget on his chest.

Fuun, he gave a goofy smile.

“Priest, did you come to plead for offerings?”

Without loosing his cool, Julio answered.

“I came here to meet a friend.”

“This is a noble studying building. Go preach to the streets.”

“I don’t remember asking for your opinion.”

Pelisson’s brow slightly paled. Once understanding that Julio didn’t have a wand, he pulled out a long, thin wand. It was a brand-new one, one that young knight’s received when joining the army.

“Judging from your words a little while ago, you seem to also have participated in the Albion campaign, Priest.”

“Aa.”

“I am a report officer from the Navarre unit. You?”

“Various jobs.”

Julio said, waving it off.

“It must have been taking care of your dragon. Like your follower. Yes.”

“For priests, any work suits.”

Pellison hit Julio’s head with his wand.

“By beating my head, you are insulting God and Founder Brimir, Officer-san.”

“I am not insulting God. I’m just teaching a cocky priest, who started acting like a noble, some manners. I’ll show you an insult.”

“So you are a noble? Then why you are so jealous about someone who is outside the noble’s circle?“

Pelisson's face reddened. Schoolgirls, who gathered around, became frightened.

“Then cast your spell!”

He shouted while uttering a spell…

The wind dragon, that was sitting behind Julio, sprang to his feet and jumped at Pelisson. And in one second, Pelisson, unable to resist, was pinned down by the large wind dragon.

“H-hey! It’s unfair! Don’t use a dragon! Guah!”

Pelisson, whose back was trampled down by the large wind dragon, fainted in agony.

“Since I cannot use magic, I use dragons instead.”

Hearing such commotion, teacher Chevreuse ran up in short steps.

“What’s this! What’s this! I think the war is already over, so stop fighting in the courtyard now! I’m serious!”

Chevreuse's eyes widened upon noticing Julio, who stood up.

“Ara ara, aren’t you an outsider? Whose permission do you have to enter? Not to mention, bringing such a dragon too!”

Taking the hand of rattling Chevreuse, Julio bowed gracefully.

“…Eh?”

After taking her hand, he looked into Chevreuse's face. Such a handsome face made Chevreuse blush despite her age.

“I am sorry. However, I only came here to meet a friend…”

“A-ara, is that so? Who?

“Yes, Miss Vallière. I want to get permission from your beautiful self, to see her today.”

“Beautiful? What?”

“Yes. In my mother country, Romalia, there is an ancient painting of a holy woman. When you appeared, I mistook you for that holy woman in the painting.”

“Oh dear! Holy woman! That!”

Chevreuse shouted in a frolicking voice.

“May I enter the school?”

“This holy woman cannot possibly refuse priest-sama! P-please take this!”

Chevreuse smoothly wrote down on paper the entrance permission, and with a dreamy face, handed it to Julio.

“Thank you. Ah, if I may, can I ask you to take care of the dragon?”

“Y-yes! Please go!”

Chevreuse stood upright and gave an emphatic salute.

“Azuro! I’m going then.”

Barking, the wind dragon Azuro, nodded to his master.

Schoolgirls stared coldly at Chevreuse, who absent-mindedly watched the back of the leaving Julio.

“W-what are you looking at?!”

“Nothing… A teacher is still a woman, indeed.”

“D-don’t make fun of your teacher! Y-you! Stop sleeping forever on the ground! Quickly, remove yourself from the foot of priest-sama’s wind dragon!”

Blushing, Chevreuse shouted at Pelisson who was groaning from being stepped upon by the wind dragon.

-Knock knock knock- someone knocked against the door. Louise absent-mindedly opened her eyes.

“Who?”

She asked.

It was silent for a moment, then,

“It’s me. Me.”

Came the answer.

Hearing that voice, Louise instantly jumped up and ran. However… after some thought, she returned back and hid under the blanket.

Must be some kind of hallucination. Because of too much longing, she started hearing voices in her head.

“Please, open up. It’s me.”

The voice sounded again. Louise slowly stuck her head out of the blanket and watched the door.

“Are you the real thing?”

“And why would I be a fake? Hurry up and open it.”

Louise sprang to her feet. Like pink lightning she dashed to the door, dressed only in a thin nightdress, and hastily tore the door open.

The face that she saw many times in her dreams, now stood before her.

“Saito…”

Louise almost crumbled to the floor.

Smiling, Saito held Louise’s shoulders.

“Sorry for taking so long.”

“Id…”

“Id?”

“Idiot…”

Louise’s eyes were full of tears.

-sob- -sob- “I was worried so much… I was terribly worried if you were dead or not… waah, hic, waaah.”

Louise sobbed. Saito gently embraced her.

“Sorry… I’m really sorry. I desperately tried to escape, but finding a ship took time.”

Saito said in a very gentle voice.

“Why, why did you leave me and go alone?! Idiot. Idiotidiotidiot!”

Louise started hitting Saito’s chest with her small fists.

Saito scratched his nose, seemingly in confusion, as he replied,

"Because, I can't really send you to your death, can I?"

"Someone as ungrateful as me, isn't it better to leave me alone....."

"Of course I can't do that." Said Saito.

"Why?" Asked Louise.

"Because I love you."

Being told so straightforwardly, Louise’s cheeks blushed.

“D-don’t be silly. No matter what you say, love has nothing to do with it.”

“Your voice is trembling.”

“It’s not trembling.”

“You love me too, right?”

He said with great confidence. Louise sank her eyes down. Louise was weak against such straight words.

“Id-Idiot. Why would I be in love with you...”

“Your face gives it out, hey, it’s already red.”

“It’s not giving it out. It’s not red. I’m not in love.”

“You put such clothes on, wanting me to push you down, right? What. So shameless.”

Before noticing, she was wearing black-cat clothes again.

“N-not true. I am just playing familiar. And I am only wearing these black clothes because that wasted sword said so.”

He grasped her tightly and laid her down on the bed.

“…Ah”

Even though she was complaining, a hot moan escaped her mouth.

Saito brought his face closer. Though she resisted, she closed her eyes.

"Wah, Ah..." While Louise was still making meaningless moans, Saito kissed her neck, making her body feel heavy as though as she had dropped into a cluster of clouds.

“Fuah, fuah, fuah…” noise escaped through closed lips.

Louise held Saito closer.

What great confidence this guy has.

Did I want him to embrace me tightly like that?

Lies. Lies.

However, my body is not listening at all.

Her arms wrapped tightly around him, clinging as if her life would depend on it, seemingly enjoying the feeling.

For a long time, Louise laid there with her face buried into Saito’s chest.

Then…

“Really, you made these black cat clothes for this?”

Casually, Saito, stripped off Louise’s black cat clothing. The part which covered her breasts.

“S… S!”

In an instant, Louise covered her breasts.

With a shocked face, she looked up at Saito. Usually, this is where the bickering, hitting, kicking and shouting would start, yet now a sweet voice escaped her mouth.

“S-stop…”

She muttered, averting her eyes from Saito.

“Show them.”

Saito blankly said such bold thing.

“S-stupid… that… not. No…”

“Why? Didn’t you change clothes back then without feeling shy at all?”

“B-because… because, you were a familiar during those days…”

“And still a familiar.”

“T-that’s right, but now it’s different.”

“How is it different?”

Uuh… Louise faltered.

“A-anyway, it’s no good now.”

“Why?”

“Because, well…”

“Tell me.”

Saito repeated words like a spell. Louise, like bewitched by it, honestly told what she was thinking.

“…small.”

“Slightly?”

“Small. Wanted.”

Louise said while blushing.

“I know.”

“…really just a tiny little bit. But not much. Well you see, only because Saito would not hate me.”

“I do not.”

“You do. I know. You always look at other girl’s breasts. The Princess, the maid, Jessica… when you compare theirs to mine…”

“When Louise shows them to me, I will not look at others.”

“Really?”

“Yes.”

He said with passionate eyes. Louise’s arm lost its strength.

Louise said in an embarrassed voice.

“Just watch. Just watch, all right? You won’t do anything else, p-promise?

“Promise.”

Saito gripped Louise’s hand and slowly lifted it up. Louise feeling so embarrassed that she could die, squeezed her eyes shut.

It felt as if eternity passed.

“…h-how are they? Small? Right? Average?

Louise demanded for his impression.

However, there was no answer.

“S-say something. Hey.”

She continued to urge him, yet there was still no answer.

Because Saito didn’t say anything, Louise became insecure.

Aah, I shouldn't have shown him after all!

But in reality, Saito was just amazed.

"Louise.

"W-what… Idiot… why you haven't said anything when I asked…"

"Louise."

He called again. Louise shouted.

"Noisy! Idiot! Shut-up!"

Louise shouted, not noticing that it was a dream. Saito and Louise had similar… meeting in a dream.

"They are small anyway! Idiot! I will absolutely never reveal them again!"

In her room, Louise talked in her sleep.

"They are perfect, because I love you."

Once he said so in her dream, Louise's body lost the strength completely.

"You really love me?

"Yes."

He said, smoothly and confidently…

Louise thought.

I should say it.

Say that important word to Saito.

But… even now she could not say it easily.

She still lacked courage when it came to that word…

Louise woke up.

“…that.”

There was no Saito around. And she was clothed in her nightdress.

“A dream…” Louise said in a dull voice.

Even in a dream, she couldn’t say that important word. Saddened, she sunk her face in her palms. Then…

“Louise.”

Her name was called from the corner of the room, startled she turned around.

The beautiful boy with the blond hair stood there leaning against the wall.

“…Julio?”

It was Julio, priest of Romalia. With a beaming aura, he watched Louise with great interest.

Louise drew the blanket around herself.

“Why are you here?”

“I came to meet you. You seemed to be having a very pleasant dream. I was not looking! Just a little bit! Umm, what on earth were you dreaming about?”

Even Louise’s ears turned crimson.

“Don’t enter without permission. It's not a battlefield tent here.”

Louise said, not revealing her emotions.

Julio handed Chevreuse’s permit document.

“Is this paper good enough?”

“Still, why did you enter a lady’s room without permission?”

“Because we are connected by a strong bond.”

Julio gave Louise his right hand, covered with a white glove.

Louise ignored his hand.

“Stop joking.”

Julio gave a carefree smile.

“Finally, I was released from the Dragon Knight Corps, so I decided to return to Romalia. Tristainians are such hard workers! Writing reports are foreign to me, that‘s why I always stayed with the squad! But I finally made a report.”

“Thank you for your hard work.”

“Before returning home, I decided to drop in and greet you.”

“Well… thank you.” Louise said with a hollow face.

“Low-spirited?”

Louise tightened her lips and buried her face under the blanket.

“I am a person to whom you owe your life. Don’t I deserve at least a little bit of thanks?”

“What do you mean?”

Louise looked up and stared at Julio

“It was I who put you on the ship.”

Instantly, Louise sprang out of the bed to her feet, and urged Julio.

“Where did Saito go to?”

“I will say it clearly. He is surely dead.”

“Stop!

“I won’t stop!”

Julio put on a serious look.

“What are you saying?! Aren’t you a priest? If you knew he was going to die, why didn’t you stop him!?”

“He did his duty. He couldn’t be stopped.”

“What do you mean 'Saito’s duty'?!”

“He is Gandálfr. Being the master's shield – that job.”

Louise gave Julio a long hard look.

“Do you know why? You weren’t listening, Miss ‘Void’. A strange name for a girl. User of the great Void.”

“…How do you know?”

“I am a priest of Romalia. I come from the country with the most advanced theology research in the world. From Tristain to Gallia.”

Losing her strength, Louise knelt on the floor. Though she was surprised about Julio knowing details about Void, what worried her more now was Saito’s fate. Understanding Louise, and trying to gently admonish her, Julio said.

“Really, you might meet him. But not otherwise.”

“Keep your theology for the dogs to eat.”

“I do not want to lecture you about theology. In reality, Romalia needs you.”

“Leave me alone.”

“I can not… time is important. Now Louise, you love him - true or false?”

After brief reflection, Louise answered.

“True.”

“Good. Though I am not a mage, I know some spell principles. Could you explain what a 'Summon Servant' is to me?”

“It’s a spell that summons familiar.”

“Is that all?”

He asked.

“Ha!” Louise made a sour face.

“Though for mages, a familiar is an important being… it is not irreplaceable. After goodbyes you can always meet someone new. I think that’s what Summon Servant symbolizes.”

“Shut up."

“I’ll pray for a new meeting. See you.”

With these words, Julio went out of the room.

Louise thought quietly for a while… and began to tremble.

“He is not dead…”

She whispered like a prayer.

“He is alive.”

She hung her head for a while, then…

Louise slowly lifted her head up again.

“Stay strong.”

He’s only missing, not dead yet, she told herself.

The door was knocked at again, Louise jumped and went up.

“Julio? Still have something to say?”

She shouted while opening the door. However, the one that stood there was…

“I do, Louise.”

It was Montmorency with an embarrassed face. She sighed once she saw Louise's face.

“I know you are very depressed. I understand your feelings… Yet you still need to go to class. You can’t rest for too long. The war is already over…”

Guiche, who stood behind, anxiously protruded his face as well. Montmorency squatted down next to Louise and softly said.

“Umm… It is still uncertain if he is dead.”

Louise, who had her face buried in her knees, stood up abruptly. As if desperately getting her courage back, she clenched her hands.

“…I know. He’s still alive.”

“T-that’s right! Saito is not one to die so easily!”

Guiche’s voice encouraged Louise as well. After that, Montmorency and Guiche, looked at each other's faces and nodded.

“That’s right. He is still alive.”

Louise stood up and muttered with a determined expression on her face.

“I’ll confirm it now.”

“Heh?”

Guiche and Montmorency were confused.

“He is absolutely alive. I will confirm it.”

Louise continued to talk in a feverish tone.

“H-how?”

Guiche asked. Montmorency seemed to understand something.

“Summon Servant?”

“Indeed.”

Louise nodded.

“The spell that summons a familiar… If I can cast Summon Servant again, then my familiar does not exist in this world.”

“I, I see.”

“Therefore… since Saito is alive I will not be able to complete the spell.”

Guiche hastily said.

“But, what if you complete th-”

Montmorency blocked Guiche’s mouth with her hand.

“Louise… maybe you should prepare yourself a little…”

However, Louise shook her head.

“If I don’t do it now, I’ll never do it.”

With a wand in her hands, Louise raised up her eyes.

Guiche began to tremble. Montmorency closed her eyes.

Silently, Louise began to utter an incantation.

Her hands trembled with tension.

Her heart trembled with fear.

‘Summon Servant’ was not an elemental spell, and everyone could use it. So Louise didn’t need to read runes to cast it.

“I, Louise Françoise Le Blanc de La Vallière, in the name of the great Five

Pentagon Powers, following my fate, summon a familiar.”

She thrust out her wand into the air.

If Saito, who was a familiar bound to Louise, was alive… the summon gate would not open.

A few moments passed.

Montmorency, who did not have the courage to open her eyes, wondered why Guiche and Louise did not dare to open their mouths.

What happened?

“Hey Guiche. How did it go?”

She asked in a tiny voice, he answered.

“Nh!”

Giving up, Montmorency opened her eyes while holding up her breath.

And… dazzled, fell to her knees.

In front of Louise, there was a mirror-shaped gate that shone with light.

Soullessly, Louise kept on blankly staring at the gate.

“Aah, that’s terrible. A great man was lost. A very great man was lost. He… loved you dearly.”

Guiche said in a painful voice.

“Louise…” Montmorency muttered.

Many summons could be seen within the gate. By that time, the selected beast or spirit would pass through the shinning gates. They could pass through only on their own free will.

Before that could happen…

“Close the gate!”

Louise closed the gate. Due to Montmorency’s scream, she did it without thinking.

Montmorency hugged Louise from behind.

“Louise… Aah, Louise…”

Louise crumbled like a rag doll to the floor.

In the end, with her courage shattered into pieces… Louise was engulfed in despair.

At that time, in a forest village near Albion's Saxe-Gotha…

Saito, who was sleeping, woke up.

He felt something shining next to him.

But… when he opened his eyes, there was nothing there.

“Somehow… Was it a dream? But I already had one dream about light.” Saito said to himself.

Then he watched his left hand again.

Every night he hoped for them to reappear…

Yet, they were gone for good.

Chapter Five: The Disappearing Gandálfr

After that, ten days passed.

After Tiffania’s ring's intensive healing magic treatment, Saito’s fatal wounds, after two weeks of sleeping and three weeks all together, were almost completely healed…

Yet he was not heading back.

Leaning upon his elbows, Saito let out a lonely sigh.

“Haaah.”

What a painful thing to hear, those sighs.

Saito was sitting on the firewood pile behind Tiffania’s house. Tiffania’s house was made from logs and some mortar.

Around it, sun-lit, beautiful trees grew.

Here, next to Saxe-Gotha, Westwood Village was located. The village was near the highway connecting Saxe-Gotha and the port city of Rosais.

Based on Tiffania’s words, the hill where Saito held off the Albion army was not too far away either.

Indeed, it was a tiny, forgotten village. Even if you looked at it, through the small cracks within the forest, you could see the ten small houses only if you were right next to it.

Derflinger, who was leaning against the woodpile, said in a calm voice.

“Weeell, seems like Albion’s army missed the Allied Forces in Rosais. Because you bought some time, the allies were able to retreat successfully. Partner, your life-threatening clash with the enemy was not in vain.”

They learned this from a merchant that came to peddle in the village the other day.

He himself had seen that merchant who came to sell cloth and chatted about the reverse defeat of the Holy Republic of Albion's army. He said - "We’ll survive through this and it will be a little bit easier," with a happy face. Albion’s nobles were not popular among the country people.

“Besides, the war ended as well. Goes without saying.”

They also learned that Gallia suddenly entered the war, forcing the Albion army to surrender.

“Even if we escaped, we won anyway.”

However, Saito still looked gloomy.

“…so it is.”

Louise and others should have been able to escape safely as well. Yet, even though he should be joyous…

He kept on staring absent-minded at his left hand, and muttered:

"Blank, is it?”

So, the runes that disappeared did not come back.

Apparently, the contract was completely broken.

“I, I am not even a Gandálfr anymore.”

“Hmm. No, I was thinking, why would a familiar contract completely wear off…”

“What, why?”

“For one moment, your heart stopped. So partner, the familiar's runes died as well. Magical spell-based objects can make assumptions too. Just like how fleas would jump away from a dying dog – the runes may have left as well.”

“I see.”

Trying to comfort the glum Saito, Derflinger said,

“Hey hey, isn’t it good? This way you won’t have to deal with that fussy noble girl’s complaints. You will be counted as dead in her eyes.”

“Indeed, yet still…”

Bitterly, he was not able to give up. Saito looked up at Derflinger and asked.

“...Can Louise make a contract again?”

“What?”

“Indeed. You heard me.”

“Sort of like double using.”

“Yes.”

“First of all, 'Summon Servant' is not only about passing. It all depends if that noble girl will open the gate in front of you or not.“

“…”

“In fact, it is still unknown why a person is chosen to be a familiar. Based on the four element system, only a beast or a spirit that represents the element of the user can pass the gates… Anyhow, that girl’s element is Void. According to what principle the familiar is chosen, I don’t know. Yet…”

“Yet?”

“This is so called ‘fate’.”

“Hmm, if I and Louise are related by ‘fate’ then could the gate open again?”

“I don’t know. But, it was fated to bid farewell here. That’s one of the problems.”

“Hmm… well, and secondly?”

“Servant Contract.”

Saito recalled how he was summoned to this world and kissed by Louise. If you think about it - everything started from that.

“Aah, that kiss.”

“That is right. ‘Summons’ and ‘Contract’. It’s because of the combination of these two, one becomes a familiar for the first time.”

“So it is not just a kiss?”

“It seems it was the ‘type’. Actually, the runes were carved into your body after that right?”

Saito remembered the sensation of burning pain.

“…so that’s everything left to do.”

“I would not recommend it.”

Derflinger muttered.

“Why?”

“Weeell, that, whether it is or not, if a familiar dies, the mage can summon another familiar… It’s different for familiars. For familiars, the ‘contract’ is a lifelong one. For familiars that live after the contract breaks, it becomes unpalatable.”

“Hmm hmm…”

“So, to put it this way, for a familiar to break a contract with the mage twice, one can only guess what would happen to the body…”

Derflinger said in an inarticulate voice.

“…”

“So, it’s bad I say. After getting life back with much trouble and putting it back under risk again… And, if the contract fails, Partner would not only embarrass himself. That girl also, would not want to see such a thing. It would be depressing.“

…*It is so.*

I'm not the only one who is in danger. It's possible that Louise would be jeopardized as well.

Still, Saito was not able to give it up.

It feels like a hole in my heart. The bond that Louise and I had, is broken. It‘s like my body is split in two, painfully.

“Therefore, don’t look so gloomy. This way you can travel to the east without holding back. We'll go together.”

“I am not a Gandálfr anymore, would it still be alright?”

“It’s good. For six thousand years, I've been alive. For me, partner‘s time feels like one second.“

Saito sighed and said.

“But what about Louise?"

“Oh dear. That girl is very prideful, it will be all right.”

In a not careworn voice, Derflinger said. Saito nodded in a persuaded way.

“Yeah. There is no purpose for her to admit me… I, who can’t use magic and am just a simple human, am a nuisance…”

Feeling depressed, he heard the voice from the back.

“Umm…”

When he turned around, Tiffania was standing there with an embarrassed face.

“N?”

“Firewood…”

Seems like Saito was asked to collect the firewood that he sat on.

She was wearing a large hat to hide her pointed ears.

“Ah, sorry.”

Saito stood up. Tiffania, avoiding Saito’s eyes, looked down and reached for the firewood. *I have been careless,* he thought. *What if they learn that I am from a different world? I guess one cannot keep a secret who and from where he is forever. Even though she rescued me... and went through the trouble to look after me when I was recovering.*

“Sorry. I am greatly indebted to you. I... it’s time for me to leave. So don’t worry. Yeah, because the war is over, a kind of awkward guy like me is not needed in the village.“

Tiffania opened her eyes wide.

“Ah, it’s different! Different! It is not so! I… umm, because you are a boy of the same age as me, I could not speak properly… I was slightly tensed… But it is not because I am afraid. So, until the wound heals properly, you should stay here awhile. I am the one who should be sorry.”

Hesitantly, Tiffania bowed embarrassed.

Seeing this girl, Saito brightened up for a moment. Besides, he was impressed. She was extremely shy toward strangers. Yet, she helped him despite herself.

“I see, you are not only cute, but gentle too.”

“I-I’m not cute!”

“You are cute. And I think you are gentle too.”

When Saito said so, Tiffania pulled the hat further down. She was feeling shy.

“I may be kind… But because of my mother's words.”

“Mother?“

Saito asked. The word had a nostalgic sound to it.

“Yes. My… dead elf-mother. She said giving the ring to me. ‘Help when you find a person in need.’ My mother was like that. Without reflecting in it myself, I carried out the words of the person that I loved. Therefore, I…”

Derflinger nosed in.

“Somehow, I think that there were complicated circumstances to it.”

Tiffania looked down.

“This Westwood Village. If you look at it, only children are here.”

“That’s right.” Saito nodded. Though his head was full with thoughts about the runes disappearing up till now... He never saw an adult here.

“This village is an orphanage. Children who lost their parents live here.“

“Do you look after them?”

“Because I am the oldest, I take care of things, as for food however…”

“You don’t have money?” Derflinger asked.

“An old acquaintance sends the money. It’s enough to cover our basic needs,”

Tiffania said hesitatingly.

“What is a half-elf, with the ‘Ancient Magic’ ring, doing in a orphan’s village?

“Derf!”

Saito warned Derflinger.

“It is alright if you do not want to tell us the circumstances behind the ring. But is there something you can say?”

Tiffania became silent.

“Sorry, we shouldn’t force you to speak about something you don’t want to speak about. Derf, act properly. That’s this sword's habit, to pry about things…”

When Saito said so… Chink! A dry sound came.

When looking up, he saw one arrow stuck in one of the firewood that he sat upon.

“Dangerous. Is there a hunter?”

Chink! Chink!

The arrows flew one after another, sinking into the ground next to Saito and the others.

“Who the?!”

When he shouted, the group looking like mercenaries emerged from the forest.

“Hey you! Is there a village chief? Call him here!”

A lot of people came out. All members were carrying weapons - bows with arrows, spears and so on.

”Wh-what for?”

Tiffania muttered in a frightened voice.

“My, what a beauty. Here, in the middle of the forest, isolated from the world.”

One said and came closer. He was a small, sly looking man with a small cut on his forehead. Apparently, he was the leader of the group.

“And who are you? Mercenaries?”

“Ex-mercenaries. Since the war ended, we returned to our original profession.”

“Profession?”

“Robbery,”

One said, then the others started to laugh.

"Really, the easy wartime was over once we suddenly surrendered to Gallia. You see, we need compensation. So we're going back to basic business, to earn food."

“Leave. There is nothing for you in here.”

Tiffania answered back and looked courageously at them. The men laughed.

“There is some.”

“Eh?”

“Even if the village looks poor, there are still some valuable things, I think. For me, a great treat would be a beautiful woman like you.”

“I think you would be worth two thousand gold coins, right?”

These robbers seemed to do kidnapping too.

One approached and the moment he tried to touch Tiffania…

Saito stepped in.

“Stop.”

“What? Kid, don’t you value your life? Except for a few exceptions, there is no interest in the market for the likes of you.”

“Don’t touch Tiffa.”

“Myyy, such a serious fellow. Want more wounds? Move.”

Contemptuously evaluating him, the robber gave a vulgar smile.

Saito reached for Derflinger. Derflinger whispered in a worried voice.

“…Partner, stop. The way Partner is today, there is no chance of winning.”

”Hey, youngster. Do you want us to murder you? Let us work in peace.”

One robber said while lowering a spear. Saito clenched his fist. *I cannot use Gandálfr's power and am just a high school student.*

But…

Saito gripped Derflinger.

“I won’t abandon someone to whom I owe my life.”

“Partner…”

“Naa, little boy. Do you know something?” said a man holding the spear.

“W-what?”

“To attack the Tristain and Germania Allied Forces, we headed toward Rosais. However, we were stopped by only a single person. I don’t know much as I stayed behind... Yet you remind me the courage of that person. I praise it.”

“It was me.”

Saito, who gripped the sword, said in a shaky voice. Men began to laugh.

“Hey hey! You say you stopped the Albion army when your hand trembles just from holding a sword?”

“At least lie better if you are lying! It was 70,000! 70,000!”

“Shut up!”

Saito raised Derflinger and sprang at a man who laughed. Then the opponent made a serious face and received Saito's sword with the spear.

“Ugh!”

Derflinger was blocked without any effort. The man turned the spear skillfully, hitting Saito's feet with it. Disappointingly, Saito fell on the ground.

Pointing a spear at his face, the man said in a cruel voice,

“Naa, youngster.”

“Ku…”

“When you’re reborn in your next life, consider your words before boasting.”

The moment when Saito was giving up, he shut his eyes…

Naudiz Isaz Ehwaz...

Voice came from the back. Gradually, it turned into song. A spell was being cast behind him.

Hagalaz Yr Beorc...

…It was similar to Louise.

Nyd Is Algiz…

When turning around, he saw Tiffania grasping the small wand that she took out some time ago. It was a small and a thin wand, like a pencil.

“What? Nee-chan is a noble? Naah, it must be another bluff…”

Berkanan Man Laguz...

The moment when a single man closed in...

In a confident attitude, like a conductor lowering a rejected baton, Tiffania lowered her wand.

The air stirred like mayflies.

The air, surrounding men, distorted.

“Fue…?”

Like a fog clearing up, the distorted air returned back to normal… Men looked at the air dumbfoundedly.

“That? What just happened here?”

“This? Why we are in this place?”

Tiffania informed the men in a perfectly composed voice.

“You got lost in the forest.”

“R-really?”

“The army is that way. Go forth to the highway after leaving the forest and then head straight to the north.”

“T-thank you…”

Step by step, the men left without reliance.

In a blank surprise, Saito watched their backs.

After the last one disappeared in the forest, Tiffania relaxed.

Then Tiffania said in an embarrassed tone.

“…I have erased their memory. Their memory stops at ‘entering the forest’. When they reach the highway, they will forget about us completely.”

“It’s magic?”

Tiffania nodded. Then Saito realized something.

“Then, the dragon knights that were helped, have lost their memory as well…”

“So. You know those people.”

Saito nodded.

Magic that erases one’s memory…

Wind, Water, Fire, Earth…

Whichever element he thought of, none could do that.

Unless…

But isn’t it a legendary element?!

While trembling, Saito asked.

“…just now, what magic was it?”

Instead of Tiffania, Derflinger answered.

“Void. It was Void.”

“Void?”

Confused, Tiffania looked at Derflinger.

“… what, this is its true identity.”

Saito, with a widely opened mouth, stared at Tiffania. This girl who had an impossible chest… secretly had an impossible power as well.

“Anyway… Why are you able to use that power? Please, tell me.”

That night, to hear Tiffania's childhood story, Saito came to the living room.

In Tiffania's house, there were three rooms. The room where Saito was resting, her bedroom, and this living room. The children lived in groups of three, but though they lived separately, they ate in Tiffania's house. After finishing the dinner and seeing off children to their houses, Tiffania took some wine out of the barn and placed it with glasses on the table.

Firewood was burning in the fireplace. In addition, some bird’s meat was being roasted on it.

“I'm sorry for waiting. Until night, I feel too uneasy to talk.“

“It’s all right,” Saito said.

Tiffania, while watching the roasting poultry on the fireplace, began to talk slowly.

“My mother was the mistress of Albion's King’s younger brother… the Grand Duke who was ruling over this whole land of Saxe-Gotha. My father was a Grand Duke of the royal family treasury, responsible for the management of the treasury. My mother used to call it 'financial supervisors’ attention'.”

“Mistress?”

Saito asked.

“Yes, mistress – a woman other than a wife.”

“Indeed.”

“Why would an elf be a Grand Duke’s mistress?”

“I do not know that. The reason why my mother, being an elf, came to the White Country to become father’s, is unknown to me. Mother never spoke about it… Nonetheless, in Halkeginia, no one thinks of elves pleasantly, it must have been some really complex circumstance.”

“Because they say they are trying to get back the sacred ground from elves.”

“Aye. In that sort of division, my mother was a truly obscure person. She never talked in public and rarely went out. In the residence, she waited for my father's return for a long, long time, continuing that sort of life. I still recall it. The back of a mother who absent-mindedly watched the door… Since I had the ears of my mother, I was not allowed to go out as well then.”

Saito was quiet and drank one glass of wine. So that’s why Tiffania was not used talking to teenage boys. Not just boys, there must have not been any girl friends either.

“However, that sort of life with mother was not too difficult. Father, who came by occasionally, was gentle and mother told me various stories too. Mother taught me how to play musical instruments and read books.”

“I see.”

“The day when that sort of life ended came. Four years ago. Father, with a changed look, came to us. He said, 'It is too dangerous here' and took us to the

house of one of father's vassals.”

“Why?”

“Mother's existence was the royal family’s secret. If it were to be found out some day that a royal family treasury manager, father, had an elf as a mistress, it would cause a huge scandal, if not more. Still, father refused to banish mother and me. The vicious king imprisoned father and did all sorts of tricks to search for our whereabouts. And, at last, we were found.”

Saito held his breath.

“I still remember it well. The day when the Advent Festival started. Many knights and soldiers came to the house in which we hid ourselves. The noble who was father's vassal, however, desperately resisted... but was no match to the king‘s military forces. Once the knights‘ footsteps echoed in the corridor, my mother hid me in the closet and locked it. I was holding the wand given to me by father, and trembled for a long time. When soldiers entered the room, mother said.”

Saito shut his eyes.

“'I will not resist. We elves do not want to fight.’ Yet, magic was the response. I heard a frightening sound when one spell after another hit my mother. Then the chasers tried to open the closet where I hid myself…”

Tiffania drank a glass of wine, with a painful expression on her face.

“And, were you caught?”

She shook her head.

“No…”

“Then, did someone help?”

“No. The spell, that I used today, saved me.”

“Then how did that magic awake?”

Not able to contain the overflowing curiosity, Saito asked it. With her eyes closed, Tiffania began to speak.

“In my house, there were a lot of valuable items as my father was a royal treasury manager. When I was small, I often played with them. There was an old music box among them.”

“Music box?”

“Yes. Treasure given to the royal family… However, it could not be opened without the ring. Yet, one day I noticed. That there was one ring similar to the lock in the treasury, and when I inserted it and opened the box, I heard a tune. It was a beautiful, somewhat nostalgic tune. Mysteriously, no one else but me could hear that tune… Even if the ring still fit.“

Saito held his breath. She looked like she was remembering something.

“Once I heard the tune, in my head… runes started to emerge. However, I did not say that to anyone, because I did not want them to find out I was playing with the treasure.”

“The runes that you used a while ago?”

“It is so. When the closet was opened by the soldiers, those runes came to my head. And I started humming it while waving the wand given by my father.”

The effect of the spell that Tiffania recited was identical to the one earlier today – soldiers forgot what they came to do in the first place, Tiffania said.

“The runes that came with the tune I heard from the opened music box, remained forever in my head. Since then, those runes saved me many times…”

When Tiffania finished talking, she drank up the glass of wine slowly. Then, she muttered to herself.

“So, ‘Void’ you say. I however, thought it to be a mystic force…”

“You should not speak about that to people.”

“Why?”

“Void is a legendary power. There might be guys who try to use that power. It is dangerous.”

“Legendary? Exaggerated!”

Tiffania laughed.

“Me, such a failure, a legend? That’s too weird!”

“It is true.”

When Saito said it seriously, Tiffania nodded.

“Understood. If you say so – I won’t tell this to anyone. Or perhaps, I could tell, then just later remove their memory...”

To Tiffania, who has grown up in a separated from people place, it was hard to understand the importance of this thing.

Saito drank wine as well.

While drinking, his eyelids became heavy.

Tiffania was literally shining like moonlight.

Saito ruminated through the story.

Such a beautiful, fairy-like, girl, has such a tragic past.

With his eyes closed, Saito fell into the world of drunken slumber.

The left hand of God is Gandálfr, the ferocious shield of the lord. His left hand wields a large sword and his right hand wields a long spear, protecting me with endless vigilance.

The right hand of God is Vindálfr, the kind-hearted flute of the lord. He dominates all beasts of life, leading me through earth, sky, and water.

The mind of God is Myoznitnirn, the book that carries the crystallization of thought. It carries all knowledge and provides advice whenever I am in need.

There is one more person, but remembering its name gives me trouble…

Taking the four disciples, I came to this land…

Saito was woken up by a singing voice.

It was not daybreak, as the two moons were hanging outside the window.

“…Sorry. Did I wake you up?”

Tiffania sat in front of the fireplace, holding a harp.

“Could you sing that again?”

Tiffania began to sing again.

The way her voice pierced the mind. The way the moonlight shined within her hair. She had a beautiful singing voice.

“Was this the song you heard together with the runes?”

Tiffania nodded.

After that, she started to play the tune with the harp. She didn’t sing this time. Saito, while listening to the tune, whisperingly asked Derflinger, who was leaning against the chair.

“…Hey, Derf. You know something?”

“What?”

“If there are other Void users… there must be other familiars like Gandálfr too.”

“Aah.”

“Talk.”

“There is a possibility. However, just the possibility. Not necessarily the reality.”

Saito got angry at Derflinger's feigned ignorance.

“Tell me.”

“What?”

“Louise’s Void must also have been awaken not by coincidence. There must be some kind of reason, right?”

“I do not know. After all, I am just a sword. I cannot understand some deep things. But, it is not that important to know anyway. Partner, you are not a Gandálfr anymore.”

“I think you are hiding something from me.”

For a moment, Derflinger’s voice became serious.

“Partner, I will say it once.”

“What?”

“I love you. Strange and honest. Therefore, please remember one thing: no matter what I say or do, I think about what is better for you. I will tell you when the time is right…”

“Is that so?”

“It’s wisdom, I tell you, it’s wisdom.”

Though Saito was about to say something… he shut his mouth.

Tiffania kept on playing. Saito closed his eyes

“..hmmm. Damn.”

“What is it now?”

“When I hear this song, I wonder why I am reminded of Earth.”

“Earth?... Is that partner’s hometown?”

“Aye.”

“It can’t be the reason for nostalgic feelings. It’s the tune that Brimir played while thinking about his hometown. It’s just homesickness I say.”

“Brimir's hometown was a sacred ground?”

“It is so. Maybe.”

“Maybe? Remember and answer properly!”

“Stop saying foolish things. It’s hard to remember things that happened thousands of years ago. Can you in detail, remember even the most recent things?”

Saito poured wine into the glass.

He drank it and muttered.

“Brimir is a god, I guess. Everyone, in Founder Brimir’s presence… starts saying prayers.”

“Idiot. He is not a god. Brimir was a free person. No, not much… he was God’s spokesman… The nearest entity to it… I think.”

“A great person anyway.”

“That is right.”

“Is this whole mess because this great guys' hometown was taken over by elves?”

“That’s not true.”

Tears were falling from Tiffania’s eyes now as she played the harp.

Due to her bond with her mother… she could recall the homeland where the elves lived.

Saito felt a sense of intimacy with Tiffania.

Her hometown was also not here.

She, like me, was a foreigner. That's why she felt so strongly about her pointed ears.

Tiffania's tears, illuminated by moonlight, shone brilliantly.

Various things whirled in Saito’s mind.

The war that finally ended…

The sign of Gandálfr that disappeared…

The meeting of a new Void user…

And… Louise.

I, who am not a Gandálfr, do not have the qualification to stay by the pink-haired girls side.

Therefore, I cannot return to Tristain.

I cannot meet Louise.

Because… all that Louise needs is Gandálfr… not this Saito Hiraga.

As he thought, he unknowingly began to cry.

The tears of homesickness and tears of heartache melted together.

Chapter Six: The Nations Conference

It was just the second moon of January since the end of the war… On the first week of the moon of Haegl, on Freyja's week, one by one, nobles from all countries gathered up in Albion’s capital Londinium.

Londinium.

Compared to all other cities of Halkeginia, it had a new atmosphere around it. The central portion of the town was skillfully built from stone, which continued to build up due to constant ruling.

One hundred years ago, Londinium was hit with a conflagration, and because the town was built of wood, it almost burned down completely. By order of Albion’s king at the time, the construction of wooden buildings had been forbidden in Londinium ever since.

This order was also meant to increase Albion's air power, which would roar over Halkeginia, as it protected the timber resources Albion needed. It had a powerful fleet established with abundant timber, and looked down on all Halkeginia from above the clouds…

However, now it was only a fairy tale of the past.

At present – Albion was like a chicken placed on the table. Wings and nails were taken off and put on the plate – burnt poultry. Halkeginia’s most powerful figures were staring at the meat like starving wolves.

The Havilland palace of Londinium was filled with people like in a party.

Gallia, Germania, Romalia… the kings and emperors of each country came on their will with many vassals and waiters just to fight over their share of this poultry.

The Queen of the Kingdom of Tristain, Henrietta’s name was also listed in the ‘Nations Conference’, as she was invited to attend the party two weeks ago.

Henrietta sat at the round table of Whitehall.

Next to her, Cardinal Mazarin could be seen. Near them was Germania’s Emperor, Albrecht the III, once Henrietta's fiance. In a battle for power between 40 men, he won the Emperor's seat and was now looking at Henrietta with a lecherous stare.

When Henrietta glared back courageously, he gave a broad grin.

“Nice to meet you, Your Highness, Princess Henrietta.”

“I’m afraid I am a queen now, Your Excellency.”

The nose of Albrecht the III turned pale.

He looked gratefully at Romalia’s ambassador, who sat in front of Henrietta. Romalia, who had a small militia participation, had very little say in this conference.

Therefore, only the ambassador was attending.

Nearby, General Hawkins was fulfilling his duty as the Plenipotentiary Albion Ambassador. The man had dauntless features; he was in his prime. Even though kings were sitting in a row before him, he had no fear. His chest was puffed out in a dignified manner, not showing the pathos of the defeated army general. Germania’s Emperor who sat next him, didn’t like such an attitude at all.

“But… that guy is late.”

Albrecht the III muttered to Henrietta.

“You mean King Joseph?”

Joseph, the King of Gallia, had not shown up yet.

“Yes. The incapable womanizer. No one else from the country was suited to be Gallia’s king. Do you know? It is said that he got the throne by killing his

younger brother. What a shameless person.”

Such were the rumors…

Loud steps were heard behind the door, then it opened.

There stood a beautiful looking blue-haired man.

The announcer called in a perplexed tone.

“His Majesty; King of Gallia!”

He seemed to have a charming figure. His back muscles bulged like a gladiator's. The neatly tightened face, framed by a blue beard.

It was Joseph, King of Gallia.

The King of Gallia watched everyone who gathered, with a broad smile on his face.

“This, this! Everyone is here! All Halkeginia’s kings meeting in this place, unbelievable! A happy day! A happy day!”

Joseph noticed Albrecht the III and tapped his shoulder.

“Dear Emperor, Your Excellency! I am sorry for not attending the coronation! Are your relatives doing fine? I mean the ones to whom you lent your castle, so that you may hold that crown.”

Albrecht the III turned pale. This castle ‘lending’ - scathing sarcasm. Joseph was making fun of Albrecht the III, who imprisoned his rivals in the castle's tower.

“A hard door and splendid chains were used for their own protection! Moreover, they were even given food. One bread crust, one glass of water, and firewood after two weeks when their bodies became cold. Just to keep them healthy. Such luxury is bad for the body. You are really a kind emperor! I would like to learn that too!”

“Aye, thank you.” Albrecht the III muttered, losing his composure. Then Joseph turned his face and this time took Henrietta’s hand.

“Oh. Princess Henrietta. You have grown. I wonder if you still remember me? We met at the end of a certain garden party at Ragdorian Lake. At the time, you were beautiful like a flower, that made all Halkeginia’s weeds hang their heads in shame. And now you are a beautiful queen of peaceful Tristain. Aye. Peaceful.”

Without looking at Hawkins and the ambassador from Romalia, King Joseph sat at the head of the table. As if it was a most natural thing.

Though Albrecht the III made a face as if wanting to say something, Joseph waved it off. Then, as if still in his own royal palace, he cracked his finger joints.

Then trays with various dishes – like Howai, Toho, etc… were brought in by the servants.

Before Henrietta and Albrecht the III, a large amount of food was placed. Henrietta and others looked at it in astonishment. It included even the finest ingredients in abundance. For some people, not even a year's wages would earn such a dish.

“The dish and the wine I obtained from Gallia. I apologize for the shoddiness, but this dish is nothing compared to the treat from the whole country, so enjoy yourselves!” The waiter poured wine into the cup, which King Joseph hung.

Henrietta’s and others cups were filled with blood-red wine as well.

“Leaders of all Halkeginia. Though it is small, first of all, let us hold the feast of celebration. The war ended. Let us toast to peace!"

The feast continued for three hours… and ended because King Joseph of Gallia suddenly decided to retire. After only making noises of eating and drinking, he yawned, and said "I am sleepy" and stood up, leaving in a hurry.

As for the conference itself - nothing was done. Whenever the King of Gallia opened his mouth, he did nothing but recommend cooking to kings, who sat in a row, and toasting, repeatedly.

Puzzled, Henrietta and others left as well.

“We are being conciliated - the real thing will start tomorrow.”

Germania’s emperor muttered and, shaking his belly stuffed with gorgeous dishes, went out of the White Hall. Henrietta stood up listlessly, her elbows tightly pressed against her side.

That moment… General Hawkins came in front of Henrietta and bowed deeply.

“With all due respect, may I have a word with Your Majesty?”

Mazarin, who was nearby, tried to intervene, but Henrietta stopped him.

“First of all, thank you for the generous treatment all of Albion’s people received. They are exhausted by a long war. You controlled not with the wand, but with the bread. By the power that Her Beautiful Majesty shines upon everyone, the people of the White Country were led well. We will accept any treatment if only Your Majesty can provide us with your words.

“Whether or not the war was just, the people deserve no punishment. Do not worry.”

Hawkins bowed deeply. Henrietta tried to pass him, but he still detained her.

“Is there something else?”

“Your Majesty… Your Majesty’s army was saved by only one hero. Do you know that?”

Henrietta shook her head.

As a matter of fact, the rumor about Saito stopping the Albion army was not delivered to Henrietta. Senior military officials could never admit being saved by a single fencer. As a result, such a rumor was silenced before reaching Henrietta in a shape of report.

“I do not know.”

“Honestly. Honestly… cowardly generals, running to save their own hides,

changed the story in their country.”

“What was that?”

Hawkins told Henrietta.

How the Albion army, that pursued the Allied Forces, was stopped by a single swordsman.

As a result, the Albion army missed the Allied Forces which tried to run away from Rosais…

Henrietta’s mind was in turmoil. The heart that never trembled after the end of the war, now began to shake.

“A swordsman… Really?”

“Yes, a swordsman. A black haired boy with a foreigner’s face.”

Not hiding his feelings, with a straight look, Hawkins said.

“The hero raged on. He even pointed a sword to the tip of my nose, until he fell down exhausted. Then, he started to move again and disappeared into the forest… I guess, he did not survive with all those injuries. Yet, it was his deed that saved Your Majesty’s army. Only one swordsman… held back tens of thousands of army troops. A proper ceremony of honor is needed."

“I see. Thank you.”

Henrietta thanked him in a shaky voice.

A black haired swordsman from a foreign country…

…Could it be Louise’s familiar, listed between the names of killed in action?

Saito Hiraga.

A strange sounding name.

A boy who came from the different world.

The Void’s familiar.

Legendary Gandálfr…

Some time ago, when my mind was blinded, when I turned my wand to Louise… He stopped my spell, Henrietta recalled.

Once again, he stopped.

Not once, but twice… he stopped it.

Hawkins said, looking distant.

“If not for him… Today, Your Majesty’s and mine seats would have been reversed. By all means, bless that brave man. In the name of Your Majesty, give him the blessing.”

That night… in one of Havilland’s palace rooms, Henrietta was lost in thought. It was a gorgeous room made to entertain the guests from the foreign countries.

Someone knocked against the door. One long, two short knocks. It was an arbitrary sign.

“Come in.”

The door opened, revealing Agnes. She carried no weapons or armor and was dressed in simple, plain clothes.

“Did you find anything?”

When Henrietta asked, Agnes shook her head.

“No… there were no clues.”

“I see.” Henrietta nodded.

Following Henrietta, Agnes came to Albion. The Saxe-Gotha revolters from the

Tristain army… suddenly, as if waking from a dream, launched an attack on their former allies of the Albion's army.

All soldiers and officers answered the same upon explaining the temporary revolt – “I thought it was necessary to do so.” Was it the cause of some sort of magic – no one knew. It was strange that tens of thousands of officers and experienced men sudden abandoned the victory; still, the cannon ball was shot out and no one could return it. Agnes, following Henrietta’s orders, investigated it for a long time.

“We thought that the water of Saxe-Gotha might be the cause, and let mages to examine it. Yet, no matter how long we examined it – it was still common, normal water. Though nobles pointed out the possibility of Ancient Magic… there is no evidence. We are in a deadlock.”

“I see… Though a mysterious event, you should not give up the hunt for the truth. There are no limits.”

Agnes bowed.

“I did not match Her Majesty's expectations; there are no excuses.”

“Lift your head Agnes. My commander. You are not responsible. Mysterious things that never have been clarified happen in this world, all the time. Ancient Magic, sacred ground, demi-humans, elves, lands of the east, the other side of the ocean, and Void. All of them puzzle the mind."

“Indeed.”

Agnes said in a tired voice. Agnes was always in motion these days. Her face looked as if it lost its zeal somewhere.

“Commander, I want to give you a new duty.”

“With pleasure…”

Henrietta spoke about what she heard from General Hawkins in White Hall today.

“Miss Vallière’s boy familiar?”

“Correct. He saved the Allied Forces… and the mother country. By all means, it is necessary to confirm if he is alive or dead. The point where he fought against the Albion army in the Saxe-Gotha area… I hear that it is in the northeast of Rosais.”

“Certainly.”

Saying this, Agnes bowed and tried to go out of the room again.

“Please wait.”

“What is it?”

To the surprised Agnes, Henrietta offered a cup from the table.

“Sake?”

Though Agnes lifted the cup while talking, she didn’t press her lips to it.

“There is something I want to ask you. Not as a queen, but as a woman… asking a senior woman.”

“What?”

“…What does revenge bring? Emptiness? Sorrow? Do you regret your doings?”

“Revenge?”

Agnes shut her eyes.

“I, too… cannot find it.”

After the musketeer commander left...

Henrietta thought about the boy that saved the mother country and herself..

She poured wine into the cup again.

Watching the liquid sway inside, Henrietta slowly traced her lips with a finger.

The lips, as if by some spell, felt like they were on fire… Henrietta’s cheeks

blushed slightly.

Saito glared at the firewood, hanging on some rope thrown over the tree branch.

“Kiiiiiiiiiiiieeeeeeeeeee!”

While screaming, he pulled out the sword and lowered it.

-Kachink- came the sound of it hitting the firewood

Then again, he aimed the sword at it and lowered. The wood was diagonally cut and fell to the ground. Applause came from the children who were watching that sort of show from the surroundings.

Saito wiped away the perspiration from his brow.

He was practicing since the morning. He was doing it together with rehabilitation. Whenever he got up in the morning - he instantly ran around the forest. The run was long. After that, he swung his sword; he practiced every day without fail. Derflinger was a useful coach. And the children watched curiously.

“Hey?”

"How was that?" Saito asked Derflinger for his opinion.

"That looks okay, not so bad, I think. Hmm, you have been swinging your blade for such a long time that your muscles have grown a bit, and you retained some muscle memory, eh?

"Really? However, I was really useless against those mercenaries....."

"Of course. Those guys are professional, you know? How could they have lost to some brat who had just played with a sword?"

"Don't say it that bluntly, please?"

Saito shot a spiteful glare at Derflinger.

"Besides, partner, weren't you so scared that your whole body was shaking? How could anyone lose to someone whose body is shaking."

"Damn it....."

“Even though it’s not enough, swing the sword. Right now, partner is not Gandálfr anymore…”

“I know.”

Under the care of Derflinger, Saito continued training.

It continued for two hours…

“T-tired…”

Saito was lying on the ground.

“Mercy. I’m wasted.”

“…You’ve been saying that since the morning.”

Still, it was a comfortable tiredness. He never moved around so much in Japan. The sun shone through the cracks in the trees, and Saito closed his eyes.

“However…”

Saito watched his hand.

“What?”

“I did not know I could move this way.”

He said slightly surprised.

Compared with the time in Japan, he was considerably stronger. If it were the old days, it would be impossible for him to run such distances while swinging a sword. Derflinger was not light at all; it was a large sword. His old self would not have been able to swing it around at all.

“Therefore, it is good for you to practice hard. However, I am saying it clearly,

as an experienced veteran in combat – you are still an amateur, don’t get cocky."

“I’m not cocky.”

“You are not yet on the level to withstand an actual combat. Do not be so confident.”

“Nonsense.”

“Aah, partner, you should practice with a sword at least…”

Derflinger muttered hurt.

“Mo, I know that myself! But I can’t do that unflaggingly.”

Saito stood up.

“U-ummm…”

Turning around, he saw the hesitant Tiffania standing.

“What's wrong?”

“…W-will you eat lunch?”

The surrounding children shouted with joy.

The lunch was prepared in the garden behind Tiffania's house, if you could call it garden; since it didn't have any separations from the forest, it was impossible to tell where the garden ended and the forest began.

Tiffania started placing dishes on the table. It was bread with mushroom stew. Seeing that Saito suddenly noticed that he was very hungry.

“Itadakimasu!”

He shouted loudly and began to eat greedily. For a moment, Tiffania was astonished, but then smiled gently. The children were also interested in Saito's behavior, who was loudly gobbling and munching it up.

Noticing such attention, Saito blushed, and started to eat more slowly.

“It is delicious. Thank you.”

Tiffania laughed while smiling.

Those children who finished the meal, began to pester Tiffania.

“Tiffa-neechan! Let’s play!”

“Hey hey, I still haven’t finished eating yet…”

“Uwaa! Tiffa onee-chan, mama…”

The boy, approximately ten years of age, buried his face between Tiffania’s breasts, making Saito instinctively spout the stew.

“Gim! Aren’t you big already? You can’t depend on mother forever.”

“Because… Tiffa-neechan grew bigger, just like mother…”

Saito became suspicious about what the boy named Gim said.

“…Hey, your eyes are not discerning. After two-three years, your eyes should be able to distinguish them. Busted!”

When he said so, Gim glared at Saito.

“Tiffa-neechan belongs just to me!”

“Yes?”

Gim ran away.

“What… he misunderstood.”

When he faced Tiffania, he saw her firmly grasped fist resting on her knee.

“Tiffa?”

“N-no! I, I watched you practicing only because you looked happy, and I was just c-curious, so…”

Apparently, she was watching the practice, and Gim felt jealous.

Saito smiled wryly.

"I understand. Because I am close to your age, you are interested, right?”

Tiffania nodded silently. Tiffania grew up in a limited space and had not spoken to the teens of a similar age.

“…But, I wonder.”

“About what?”

“I am not scared of you. The dragon knight boys that I helped some time ago, were scary somehow…”

“I wonder why.”

“Oh well… I thought that maybe the reason that you are not afraid of me, as when I am scared, I become insecure myself, but it is somehow different with you…”

Apparently, Rene and the others were afraid of Tiffania. Oh dear, that could be it. Halkeginia’s nobles seemed to be afraid of elves due to the wars…

However, since Saito was not a noble from Halkeginia, he did not take part in wars either.

“Nonsense. Who would be afraid of such a cute girl like you?”

When Saito said so, trying to comfort Tiffania, she hesitantly turned.

However… when she hesitantly turned with both of her hands on her knees, naturally, her breasts were squeezed by her arms. Huge, shape-changing fruits. He did not know where to look.

Tiffania, noticing that Saito turned his eyes away shamefully; in a panic, covered her chest.

Though she gave Saito a light glare… as if remembering something, she became serious again.

“But… you really don’t want to inform them?”

Saito nodded with a serious look as well. This morning, Tiffania asked if he didn’t want to inform his family that he is all right. He said to Tiffania that though he wanted to return back to that place, no one cared if he was alive or not…

“Your family who was left in Tristain does not worry?”

“It’s all right.”

“I could send a letter…”

“It’s all right.” Saito repeated lonely.

“Your family will surely be worried about your safety.”

“There is no family in Tristain.”

“Then, where are they?”

“In a place where letters can not reach.”

“…Eh?”

“It is nothing. Please forget it.”

Tiffania, not knowing what to say, fell silent. Then noticing that Saito's stew plate was almost empty, Tiffania picked it up.

“I, I’ll bring seconds.”

Saying so, she disappeared in the house.

Saito lightly bit his lip.

After all, maybe he should tell the truth?

That there is a Void user besides Tiffania; to whom I was a familiar.

Though, that might worry her…

He felt someone's presence. *Did Tiffania return already? That was very fast. Though I wanted some time to prepare my mind for this moment, there is no other way.*

Saito said in a constrained voice.

“Though I do not have family in Tristain, however… There is an important person. Yet… I do not have the skills needed to appear in front of that person anymore. I’m not a familiar of that person already. Therefore…”

His hesitant explanation was interrupted by a low woman's voice.

“What are you doing here?”

It wasn’t Tiffania’s voice.

Frightened, Saito looked up.

The commander of the musketeers stood there.

“I thought it would be harder to find you. I’m disappointed.”

In the living room of Tiffania's house, Saito sat opposite from Agnes.

Agnes, who took off her black mantle and sat on the chair in a green tunic, amazed, watched Saito.

“I was going to enter the forest through the road, and search for you in all the villages that I walked past. Look, I came fully prepared for this. Since I was going to conduct a search operation in such a huge forest, I prepared at least two weeks of rations ..... along with items that could keep dew away as I stayed overnight. I've even brought along boots for me to change. And then I found you eating lunch in the first village I reach..... Seriously, what an anticlimactic ending.”

Agnes pointed at the stuffed rucksack and said.

“I see. So you are saying that the Princess looked for me?”

Asked Saito, after hearing about circumstances. Tiffania, with an embarrassed face, stood hesitantly as usual. There was no time to put a cap on her head either.

After drinking the tea on the table, Agnes stood up.

“Let’s go then. Miss, we are indebted to you. Though this is not much, take our expression of gratitude.”

After throwing a bag with golden coins towards Tiffania, Agnes turned to the doorway.

“What?”

Seeing Saito not moving, Agnes made a suspicious face.

“Umm… could you tell the Princess that I died?”

“What? You don’t want to be honored by Her Majesty and removed from the commoner’s list?”

Saito said.

“The Princess will inform Louise about it.”

“So what? Aren’t you Miss Vallière’s familiar?”

“Not anymore.”

“What?”

Saito showed to Agnes the left hand on which runes disappeared.

“Though I do not understand because I am not a mage… there should be letters engraved.”

“At the time when I was dying, the runes disappeared. Since I am not a familiar, I am a free human now. Therefore, please say that I died.”

Though Agnes was gazing Saito… her glance stopped on Tiffania. Being

watched by Agnes, Tiffania shamefully hid her ears. Though she was going to erase the memory from behind… was she seen through?

“Elf?”

“…Half.”

“Is that so.” Agnes muttered.

Seeing that Agnes was not afraid of her, Tiffania asked timidly.

“You are not scared of elves?”

“I don't make a habit of being scared by those who do not show malice.”

Sighing, Agnes slumped back into the chair again.

“All right. I will say that you are dead.”

“Really?”

“Aah. Instead… I will stay here for a while.”

“What?”

Saito and Tiffania stared at Agnes with their mouth’s agape.

“There is no date specified. Besides...“

Agnes said in a somewhat tired tone.

“I want to take some rest. Ever since the war started, I haven't had much sleep.”

That night...

Saito, laying on the bed, stared at the ceiling, unable to fall asleep. He heard creaky sounds coming from the corridor. Then, someone knocked against the

door.

“Agnes-san?”

He thought it was Agnes who was sleeping in the living room, but he was wrong.

“It's me.”

Came the shy voice of Tiffania from the other side of the door.

“Come in.”

The door opened revealing Tiffania. She wore a thin night cloth and had a candlestick with a wax candle in her right hand. The candlelight melted smoothly with Tiffania's blond hair.

“What's wrong?”

Saito said in a strained voice.

“I want to talk to you about something. Can I?”

“Alright.”

It was the first time he saw Tiffania changed into her nightclothes. Though the nightclothes were loose, it hugged Tiffania's developed body tightly. Because of her young features, when the outline of her body was hidden, she looked very childish.

When Tiffania put the candlestick on the table, she sat on the chair.

And asked Saito in a serious voice.

“Hey Saito. Who are you? You don't have any family in Tristain, however, the Queen of Tristain is searching for you. 'I am not a familiar anymore' you said. How can a human be a familiar? If you don't want to tell me, it’s alright, however… However, I feel uneasy.”

Saito worried.

If he had to explain it, the talk would touch "Void".

That there is a girl named Louise, who, like Tiffania, is a user of Void…

But maybe he should not tell that to Tiffania, who lives peacefully in the forest. It might put her in an unnecessary danger.

When Saito kept being silent, Tiffania continued asking.

“When I played the harp, you cried…”

“You saw?”

“Yes. When listening to that tune, tears fell from my eyes. I remembered mother and the place where she was born. Though I do not know about it… for some reason, I still call it my hometown. Do you remember your home?”

Saito nodded. Apart from the explanation of Void, he could talk about himself...

“Where is it? If you want to talk that is.”

“…In a country of Earth.”

“What?”

Tiffania stared at him with wide eyes.

“As I said, I am not from here. From another world. I am a human that came from there.”

“I don’t understand.”

“You don’t? That’s why I did not want to talk about it.”

“Where you come from? How?“

“That… somehow I was summoned as a familiar. I do not understand it myself really.”

“There must be some reason…”

“There may not be one. As for the reason I ended up in here…”

“I absolutely want to know.”

“Well I became a familiar with an ability to use any weapon.”

Saito said in a soliloquy way.

“You can’t use them anymore?”

“Yeah.”

“That’s why you do not return to Tristain? But what about your master…”

“It’s all right.”

“You don’t want to meet that person?”

“That’s not why - I cannot meet her. It’s because as a human, I am useless now and have lost any purpose…”

Seeing Saito like this, Tiffania said in a sympathetic voice.

“You love her, don’t you?”

Once she said so, tears started flowing from Saito's eyes. Feelings that had been restrained till now broke free, and Saito cried raggedly. Tiffania stood up and hugged Saito’s head close to her.

“I'm sorry, I'm sorry. Don’t cry, don’t cry.”

After a while, once Saito’s sobbing subdued, he apologized to Tiffania.

“I'm sorry for crying.”

“It’s all right. I also cry sometimes…”

Tiffania, even after Saito stopped crying, rested his head on her chest. Tiffania’s soft and big bosom settled Saito’s mind down.

“…That is so. That’s why I felt close to you.”

“To me?”

“Aye. It was the hometown to which you cannot return. I have one as well. I think this was the reason why you started crying after hearing my harp.”

He looked at Tiffania’s slumber attire.

“Do these clothes look unusual to you?”

“That’s right.”

The night clothes that Louise wore, were of a different design.

“These are Elven clothing. I got them from my mother. Because Elves live in the desert… they wear such clothes. The texture protects from the sun during the daytime, and the warmth protects from night’s cold. Because it is warm, I made it into nightclothes.”

Tiffania said in a longing tone.

“When the night comes, I remember mother. She was very beautiful and gentle. When I go to sleep and put these clothes on, I feel like I am held by mother again.”

“Yeah.”

“Lands in the east… Mother's hometown… I want to go there. But I cannot.”

”Why?”

“Elves dislike humans. When they see the ‘mixed’ me, they will not understand.”

In a sad voice, Tiffania said.

“And humans are afraid of Elves. They will not be afraid of me as long as I'm an unknown girl. Human in daytime. Elf at night. And neither in the end. A failure.”

“You are not a failure.”

Looking up, Saito said.

“Why?”

“You are very beautiful. When I saw you for the first time, I honestly thought you were a fairy. So have more confidence.”

Tiffania blushed.

“…”

“S-sorry… I didn’t have anything strange in mind when I said that…”

“Don’t say that again. It’s embarrassing.”

“Alright.”

“It was the first time someone told me I am beautiful. You are really a weird person. Instead of being afraid of me, you say I am beautiful.”

“But you are beautiful…”

When Saito said that, Tiffania quietly pushed Saito away.

“Tiffa?”

“…Muu, I told you not to say that again.”

“W-w-why you are so angry? It is not bad to be called beautiful.”

“S-stop saying that I am beautiful. I, I want you to be silent.”

Saying so, Tiffania stood up.

Confused, Saito scratched his head.

The next morning...

“Get up.”

N? Saito thrust out his head, but it was still dim.

“Isn’t it night still…?” he muttered and dived back under the blanket. Then the blanket was torn away.

“What the!”

He shouted and felt a sword pointed at his nose.

“Get up. I won’t repeat myself three times.”

In the darkness, he recognized Agnes' face. He also noticed that the pointed sword was Derflinger.

”It’s great, partner!”

“Ah?”

“The commander of the musketeers will be taking care of your training from now on! Under her guidance, you will gain skills in no time!”

Agnes smiled.

“Since I’m bored anyway, to kill time, I will train you, with pleasure.”

“I-is that so…”

He said scratching his head, but his cheek was pulled.

“W-what auch auch?!”

Then a hand gripped Saito’s ear and brought his face close to Agnes, who said.

“Alright? From today on, your only answer is ‘Yes’. Is that clear?”

She had a power different from Louise, and Saito nodded instinctively. It was a musketeer commander with stern look and not a young, beautiful woman.

“Y-yes…”

“I can’t hear you.”

“YES!”

“One minute. Put your clothes on and come to the garden.”

And once he ran to the garden, still hastily putting his clothes on, Agnes stood there with her arms crossed. When Saito stood before her, she reported in a lowered voice.”

“Ten seconds late.”

“That, only ten seconds…”

She roughly pulled his cheek, Saito shouted in an almost crying voice.

“Yes! I’m late!”

“Well then, one hundred push-ups.”

She said simply, and Saito started doing push-ups.

After that, the basic training of hell continued. He was made to run around the forest for a long time, then his strength was trained using a log. The hard and intensive training that he was doing seemed like games now.

Once no one was around, Saito, as one would expect, collapsed on the ground. Then water was sprinkled on him.

“Dog. Exhausted already?”

Being called a dog made Saito clink.

“Sorry, but my name is not dog. My name is Saito.”

“If you want to be called by a human name, become an equal person.”

Then she pulled out a wooden sword.

“Next – swords.”

As soon as Saito struggled to his feet, she turned around and drove it straight into his belly.

“I-I haven’t taken the stance yet… w-why…”

When he muttered, fainting in agony, Agnes smiled.

“Do you think ‘taking a stance’ would matter in actual combat? First of all, you need to train your basic physical strength for half a year and only then start training the skills…”

Agnes then turned again and thrust the sword out at a high speed.

“Fighting is not elegant. Skip the ‘art’. I’ll teach you the meaning of the word ‘sword’.”

After one hour, Saito collapsed again. He fainted. Agnes poured a bucket of cold water on him again.

Saito, who woke up, stared at Agnes absent-minded.

During the one hour… Saito burbled and received a lot of damage. Saito’s sword didn’t even scratch Agnes. She just dodged, blocked it, and then hit any part of him with her sword.

“Do you know why you cannot land a hit on me?”

“I don’t know.”

“It’s because our swordsmanship is not the same. Do you understand at least that?”

Saito nodded. If you swing a sword at Gandálfr’s speed, there is no need to avoid enemy attacks.

“It works if it is a surprise attack. However, if the enemy anticipates it, you will never hit.”

“Yes.”

“Alright, halt your own attacks and wait for the chance to attack the opponent. Use your eyes to seize the opportunity.”

“If there is no opening… then what do I do?”

“Create it.”

Until the evening, no matter how hard Saito wielded sword against Agnes, he could not graze her.

Laying on the ground, exhausted, Saito muttered.

“Why… why can't I even graze…”

Agnes said in an amazed voice.

“Pfft, with the sword, the swordsman gain a noble's fame. Without actual combat experience, you are just an amateur to be defeated.”

“…A little while I had this thought. I am useless after all. I am no good with blades.”

Saito whispered, to which Agnes answered.

“There is no time to ridicule yourself; take the sword. A dog doesn’t have the right to belittle itself.”

Chapter Seven: Louise's Decision

The cold night continued.

It seemed like the night would last forever. But, when at last morning came, she fell asleep. She woke up at noon and went to sleep again. It was a mentally exhausting cycle.

Two weeks passed… after using Summon Servant and learning about Saito's death. All during this time, Louise never even took a single step out of her room. From time to time she got off the bed to eat the dishes placed at her door. She didn't care anymore who was placing it there.

Only in her dreams could Louise meet Saito. So Louise tried to sleep all day long. Whenever she could not fall asleep, she drank wine. For Louise, the distinction between morning and night had already lost its meaning. The curtains in her room were always closed, so it was always dim.

Such a way of life gradually devoured the boundary between day and night.

The boundaries between dream and reality became ambiguous too.

However, that was the only world that Louise longed for.

She wanted to stay forever in that dream world, where she could meet Saito.

Even if someone knocked on the door, Louise did not answer. In order not to hear if someone called for her, she stuffed her ears with cotton. All locks were locked, preventing anyone from entering the room. She hugged her pillow as if it was Saito… closing her eyes and pressing her cheeks against it.

Saito in her dreams always… gently embraced Louise, holding her close.

And did it many times with love.

This was the ideal Saito of Louise’s subconsciousness.

From the bottom of her heart, she wanted to be with her beloved familiar.

…On the evening of that day, Louise had a dream about Saito.

They were strolling together besides Ragdorian Lake.

“The water is beautiful.”

“Yeah.”

Hand in hand, the couple walked around the lake.

Louise was wearing a black dress and black beret, like on her first date with Saito. That appearance was mirrored by the beautiful surface of the water.

“Here, the Water Spirit was seen, right?”

“Yeah.”

Louise could not express herself at all. Even though she had things she wanted to say to him, she could not say anything at all.

It felt that uttering them would break this little world of theirs.

Louise felt as if, as soon as she opened her mouth, this mirror that reflected such a warm and fake world would shatter, and she would be swallowed by unending darkness.

“Louise, hey, come here. This light reflected on the water is very beautiful.”

“Waa, truly beautiful!”

“But, not as beautiful as you, Louise.”

“S-stop saying silly things!”

“It is true. I think you are more beautiful than anyone. So, I want to be together. Always together.”

“Then, you won’t go anywhere, right?”

“Aah, I won’t go anywhere.”

Deep inside Louise knew; this was just a dream. But she kept on repeating a badly acted play between Saito and herself. In fact, she was the only spectator watching it.

“I have something to tell you.”

“What?”

Louise muttered embarrassed as she stepped into the water.

“Stop it Louise. The water is cold, you’ll freeze.”

There was something special about words spoken in this lake. Perhaps it was because of the Water Spirit, the spirit of oaths; oaths forged here could never be broken.

In the dream, Louise wanted to tell it to Saito.

“…I want to swim. Why don’t we swim together?”

“All right. If you get cold, I’ll warm you up.”

So…

It was a dream.

True, Saito was not that gentle.

Still… she was happy. Because it’s impossible in reality for her and Saito to meet again…

-Pachpach- Saito entered into the water.

She thought he was going towards her, but was wrong.

Steadily, Saito went further into the lake.

“Saito… Where are you going?

Saito waved her back with a smile.

“Stop! You’ll drown!”

Slowly… Saito's body disappeared in the water. Louise ran after him.

“Wait! Do not go! Please!”

However, Louise's shouts did not reach him. Saito went fully under the water.

Louise ran towards him, splashing the water.

Seeing Saito, as if asleep, sinking further to the bottom of the water, Louise went in a half-frenzy.

“Wait! No! No, don‘t go there! I said stop!“

Saito’s figure became smaller and smaller.

“Wait! Please!

“Wait!”

Louise sprang to her feet. It was pitch-dark in the room. It was night, apparently. Waking up at night led her to despair. Though it was not much different than waking in the morning, waking at night was more exhausting.

Yet, Louise was not relieved that it was a dream. It was the same – dream or reality. Either way, she felt the same pain, the same guilt.

That day, when Saito left, she berated him non-stop.

“Where are you, Saito?”

She understood.

“Is it… cold in there? Like on the bottom of Ragdorian Lake… is it cold and dark?”

Saito stands in the place where I can't go… where my voice will never reach him. Though she knew that, she could not help but say it.

"I want to meet you."

Louise closed her eyes.

And… she muttered in a fading voice.

"Can I go too?"

No tears left. Just a body, dully wrapped in helpless numbness.

"I can't bear it anymore. I can't bear the parting in the dream. Therefore, can I go to the place where you are?"

Louise knew.

There's only one way to get there…

But, this would mean betraying everything.

Betraying her duty to her mother country, her mission as Void user, her hopes and beliefs, loved ones… and Saito too, who died to save her… she would be betraying that too.

Louise understood that well. However, she could not think of anything else.

But now, being saved meant to meet her kind familiar again, only this way.

"I want to tell you those words. Those that I could not utter even in my dream… So, can I go to meet you? I want to say them by all means. I want to tell them to you… So, forgive me."

Louise rose from the bed and headed towards the door barefooted.

Midnight.

Louise chose the artillery tower, where people rarely came. She could not remember how she got there. By the time she noticed, she was already standing on the roof. There was nothing on the circular roof except a hole that led to a staircase going down the tower. A low stone fence enclosed the circumference of the roof.

-tap tap tap- Louise approached the stone fence and climbed on top of it.

When she stood there, she looked down to the ground. It was pitch-dark and nothing below could be seen. Yet, she felt that somewhere on the other side of darkness, Saito waited for her.

“If I go to the same place… we can meet.”

She whispered and tried to take that one step into the space.

However… she couldn't take that step forward. Her legs were not obeying her. Contrary to her will, her body still wanted to live, which angered Louise.

“Even though Saito.....is just right in that dark place.....Why do I still want to stay in the light?”

When she decisively bit her lip… the voice came from behind.

“Miss Vallière! Please stop!”

When she turned around, she saw Siesta standing there.

Apparently, Siesta was worried about Louise. She might have been the one that brought her food as well.

Unable to look straight at her face, she subconsciously averted her eyes.

“What are you trying to do?!”

“C-calm down.”

“Even if you do that, it will not bring Saito back!”

"Maybe so… but I cannot meet him anyway. Upon casting the Summon Servant spell, the gate opened. I’ve got to do it, or I will never meet him."

“Summon Servant, so what?!”

Siesta ran up to Louise, trying to catch her.

However, her feet tangled with her long dress… and she fell down.

“Ah!”

Siesta fell forwards… pushing Louise.

Feeling her body in the air, Louise closed her eyes.

In her mind, words flashed.

I can meet Saito…

In there, you will warm me up, right?

It must be really cold in there…

And then, I will tell you those words.

The words that has not been said for a long, long time… I will say.

“Say. To say. Will say…”

She muttered softly, waiting for the impact with the ground that was about to come…

Yet, there was nothing.

“…N?”

Louise timidly opened her eyes.

Then… she saw the shape of the tower lit by the moon. However, it was not up above. When Louise looked up, she saw Siesta gripping her ankle.

“Siesta?”

“A, auuuu…”

It looked like a tough position. Siesta was barely hanging by one foot on the stone fence.

“L-let go.”

“W-w-won’t let go.”

“Do you want to fall down as well?! It’s all right, let me go!”

“Han, ngh, won’t!”

Siesta said fiercely.

“If Miss Vallière dies, Saito will be sad. He… used the sleeping pills that I gave to him… to let you go, didn’t he? Even though I told him to use them! Therefore, I won’t let you go. Saito-san didn’t want you to die! So, I won’t let you die either! Absolutely not!”

“C-calm down…”

Louise said weakly, yet Siesta still kept shouting.

“Please do not misunderstand me! Miss Vallière is still no good! But, I do not want to see the tears of the one I love… gugugu…”

“Saito cannot shed tears anymore!”

“Why? Do you have evidence of his death?”

“Haven’t I told you already?! Summon Servant-“

“I don’t understand these magic things! Summon Servant, so what! Rather than those things, I believe in the one I love!”

Once she said "believe in the one I love", something lit up in Louise's heart.

Feelings to which she had not been able to be honest with, while timidly crying in her bed.

Siesta repeated it loudly.

“You love him! So why don’t you believe in him?!”

“B-because…”

Her dried up tear glands… were filled with tears again. Because she was hanging upside down, the tears ran down her temples.

“Even I… was depressed. But, if we don’t believe, then who will? Right?”

“Uh, uuuh…”

“Saito-san in Albion said to me, when I was worrying, if something bad might happen to him, he said ‘Calm down. It’s all right. Everything is all right. When you return back to the school, please make the stew for me again.‘ I don't believe in God, Founder Brimir or the kind… I believe just in these words!”

Siesta exclaimed.

Saito said it to me.

"I’ll protect Louise."

For Saito, going somewhere alone, where Louise could not be defended, was impossible.

Because Saito protected me from all the things.

When in need, I was always saved by him. Therefore…

Louise wiped the tears away with the back of her hand.

I was embarrassed, thinking that there was no other way.

I was weak.

Siesta, who cannot use any magic, was much stronger than me.

Even if you can use the legendary element… it is only a wasted treasure when one’s mind is weak.

Seeing the weeping Louise, Siesta said.

“…Uhm, Miss Vallière. I’m sorry for what I said.”

“It’s all right. It’s all right. I'm the one who's sorry…”

“Really, that, umm, I'm sorry. What I just said is about to become completely useless."

“It is not useless. You taught me an important thing… I won’t forget it. So, don’t worry.”

“Not that.”

“Eh?”

“My foot is at its limit.”

Then the foot upon which Siesta was desperately supporting herself slipped off the wall.

They both plummeted directly towards the ground, screaming.

In Vestri Courtyard…

Montmorency asked Guiche at her side…

“…What do you want to show me, in the middle of the night?”

When she was sleeping, she was asked to come here. But… even if you came here, was there anything? Could he be having some strange thoughts? Montmorency glared at Guiche.

“No, it’s because I completed something with great effort. And I called you at such time because… I wanted you to be the first to see it.”

“Completed? What did you make?”

“This.”

Guiche quickly pulled something, and where a moment ago was nothing, appeared…

“What… A statue?

What showed up in there was… a huge statue of at least five meters tall.

Because a magical cloth that imitated surroundings was used, there seemed to be nothing there. Guiche nodded in satisfaction, while pointing at the statue.

“Saito’s statue.”

“Heeh…”

The splendid statue stood with both hands on its waist and thrusting out its chest. It was made with precise details.

“Took me weeks; I worked fiercely during nights. It was a very tough time, but I finished it up unflaggingly in here.”

“You have skills.”

Montmorency watched Guiche with an admiring face.

“I will put an Alchemy spell on it now, and change the soil into bronze. And… this way, I will praise the hero forever.”

“I will show it to Louise later, Surely it will comfort her a little.”

“Indeed.”

Montmorency looked down slightly, with an unusual blush on her cheeks.

“Forgive me Guiche. It seems I had misunderstood you. I thought that you were lacking in delicacy.”

“R-really? Oh dear, even if you thought so…”

“However, now my thoughts are changed. You are a gentle, wonderful man, Guiche.”

Guiche became embarrassed and rubbed under his nose.

When looking up, Montmorency, in a shy way, placed her finger on her lips. Guiche, not waiting, brought his lips close to Montmorency's.

"M-monmon…"

Montmorency, though hesitated for a moment, did not move away from Guiche.

When the pair of lips were about to touch… Montmorency closed her eyes, and opened them.

"G-girls are falling."

Guiche moved his lips away.

"And? Whenever you try to kiss me, such words come, cheating on me! Like that day when you imagined the Princess naked!"

"Now it's true! Hey! Kyaa!"

Montmorency opened her eyes.

Hearing a strong sound from behind, she turned around facing the same way as Guiche.

"M-my art. Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah!"

Guiche's masterpiece turned miserable. It was crushed back into the dirt by the fallen girls.

On the heap of earth, two girls were lying, tired out.

It was Louise and Siesta.

"What is this?! Do you have some grudge against my art! Choosing such a place to fall! Such a place!"

"…Art?"

With a blank surprise, Louise who was now covered with soil, asked.

“Saito’s statue! Aaah, for several weeks, every late evening, little by little, I finished it with just my hands… I can’t rebuild it!"

“…Saito’s statue?”

Louise looked next to her. There… was Saito’s face. Siesta and Louise knocked against the right and left shoulder of the statue, thus, though the statue crashed down, the part of the head of the statue was still all right.

And the soft soil served as a cushion for the two falling people.

“…Saito… Saved me again.”

Louise muttered. Siesta grasped her hand.

“Hey! Saito-san helped us even in a form of a statue! Therefore, he must be alive! Absolutely!”

Louise nodded.

Her beautiful eyes regained its shine.

Then Louise stood up. Montmorency ran up to her.

“Louise! What were you doing?! Are you all right? Are you injured?”

“I’m all right. Not injured at all.”

“No, you cannot decide about your injuries just by yourself…”

Louise glared at Montmorency.

“I said so. Thus it is decided. Now, Siesta, let’s go.”

“Yeees!”

Siesta gladly stood up as well.

That strange pair, her classmate and a maid, amazed Montmorency. They fell from the sky, almost dying… so why were they so energetic now?

“G-go where?!”

“To search for Saito.”

“Eh, but…”

“He is alive.”

Louise whispered with a great confidence.

“Louise?”

Montmorency, anxiously watched her classmate's face. She thought that Louise, because of the shock, became mad.

“Relax, I am not mad.”

“B-but… the gate actually opened…”

“I have been depending for so long… On that foolish familiar. Even now, that idiot protected me!”

“Louise, Louise, calm down. Summon Servant is absolute. As long as the contracted familiar exists in this world, the gate can not open!”

“I thought so too. But he can’t be gone so easily.”

“Louise!” Montmorency shouted.

However, Louise's complexion didn't change. There was unwavering power in her eyes.

“Believe.”

“…Believe?”

“Yes. Even if everyone in the world says 'Saito died', I will not believe it until I see it with my own eyes. Even if magic tells that he is dead, I will not believe it.”

She held her breath, amazed at Louise's strength.

“He said to me. ‘I will defend you no matter what’. And I believe in those words. Therefore, he is alive. Absolutely.”

Firmly watching straight in front, Louise said.

“That’s right, he is my familiar, and he cannot die without my permission, and I don’t permit it!”

Meanwhile, when Louise was falling down the tower…

In the Westwood Village, the devoted, tough practice continued at night.

Agnes decided the time to practice was like this:

Night, morning… and dinner.

Suddenly, a wooden sword was thrown. It was in the place of training.

The front yard of Tiffania's house…

In front of Saito, who wielded the wooden sword, Agnes was standing. Though Saito's breath was rough, Agnes' breathing was calm.

Saito set up the wooden sword, and Agnes swung hers and lowered it. Though he dodged it, his arm was severely hit, and the sword fell from it…

“Ugh…”

Saito held his arm while kneeling.

“What’s wrong?”

“Uh, arm hurts.”

“It is natural. It's painful if you're hit. It is more painful if cut. Thus, it is good if it is a wooden sword.”

The wooden sword hit the ground next to Saito.

“Auh… why didn’t you hit me?”

“Think about it, dog.”

“I am a human, so-“

“Alright.”

Agnes said, beating Saito's head with the wooden sword, hard.

“…eh?”

“Think well. It is you who swung the sword previously. I, following, just swung my sword back. If you see it many times, you can remember an opponent’s sword movement. Matching it is the very point of a little training. The thorough analysis of technique.“

“But, when I attack Agnes-san, I cannot even touch you. Like the previous technique…”

“Range. I have judged the limits of your range. It can be easily tracked by the position of one’s feet. If I move, staying out of your range, your sword will never hit me.”

“Indeed.”

“Have you seen my sword movements?

Saito nodded.

Agnes set up the wooden sword.

“Alright. Range. Remember to keep it.”

And then… she swung it.

Saito bent exaggeratedly backwards in panic.

“Don’t look at the sword. Look at the legs.”

As she said… Saito watched Agnes' foot. Agnes started to slowly rise the sword.

Seeing Agnes's feet, Saito felt her natural range and pulled himself away.

“Do not try to block the sword with a sword. Dodge the opponent's attack.”

-swing swing- Agnes’s swings quickened with the course of time.

“When attacking for a moment, the swinging sword is lowered. If you move your body at that moment, when the opponent swings and lowers it, your attack can reach them. Measure the timing.”

Saito, watching Agnes's feet, turned his attention to the sword.

And… is this the right moment? He thought, waiting for the moment.

While seeing it many times, he could judge it safely. Keeping the timing… the moment when half of her body was averted, he launched into attack.

“Gu!”

Agnes groaned.

Saito's sword hit her shoulder.

“I, I hit it! I hit it!”

Saito was making an exaggerated noise. Agnes finally laughed.

“Now this was timing. Even though you did it right, there could be also feints, but eventually you would learn it all.

“Yes.”

“Follow the body.”

That time, the sword practice continued, all night long.

Morning started to break… finally released from practice, Saito was washing himself.

He was pouring water from the wooden bucket onto his head. The water felt cool on his burning body. However…

“Ouch!”

The cold water permeated into his wounds.

His body was filled with bruises and abrasions. Agnes didn’t have any mercy on

his body.

“That person is a real bi… dog." muttered Saito, looking down shamefully.

However, the pain felt good.

Little by little, Saito felt he was stronger.

Not by the power given by Gandálfr, but by true, self power…

Such feelings of growth every day, were not bad feelings.

Saito forgot his towel; flustered, he tried to wipe his upper nude body. It was a season still near winter. Even though his body burned, it still got cold.

“Use this.”

When he, startled, turned towards the voice – Tiffania stood there with a towel. Seeing Saito’s upper-body's nakedness, an embarrassed blush spread on her cheeks.

“Thank you,” Saito said, receiving the towel, and started to wipe his body.

Tiffania looked hesitant, as if wanting to say something.

“What’s wrong?”

Urged, Tiffania opened her mouth.

“W-working hard.”

“Aye. Because I want to be stronger.”

“Can I ask something?”

“All right.”

“Uhm… recent injuries. They were from confronting Albion's army, right…? You stopped that huge army from advancing?"

Shaking his head, Saito replied,

“Who told you that?”

“That Sword-san – Derf-san.”

“He can’t stop chatting…”

“Did you really confront 70,000 troops, how did it feel?”

“100 more or less. Well, even I could not understand how many there were of them. It felt like jumping into a huge typhoon.”

“Typhoon?”

“No… that's what a severe storm doing huge natural damage is called…”

“You are courageous.”

Saito shook his head.

“It’s different. Because I was powerful then… Hey, remember the power I talked about before?”

“Something about ability to use all weapons?”

“Indeed, Because I had it, I could stand against 70,000. Today, I do not have it.”

Saito said, staring at his left hand.

“No matter how powerful one is… still nothing can be done. To defend the one you love, one you trust. You said it the other day – important person…”

“Aye.”

“Now… are you training yourself to defend the person you love?”

“It’s different. I already said I am not worthy of defending her.”

Tiffania became silent.

“Her enemies are strong. Her goals are big. She will not need someone who can barely swing a sword."

“Then why you are training so hard?”

“To return.”

“To return?”

“Aye. The other day… when I heard Tiffa’s performance, I remembered my home and became homesick. I thought about returning there. This thing I should do. Louise has things that she should do… And I have mine. For this purpose, I try to improve my sword skills. This world is a dangerous place. I have to find my own way to defend myself…”

Said Saito, in a somewhat settled voice.

“That person is named Louise?”

Saito feeling a little shy, nodded.

“Yeah.”

“…What kind of person is she?”

“Pink hair... short...”

“Beautiful?”

Saito didn’t answer. He began to put the clothes on.

“You are great.”

“It’s not about greatness. Yet, as I said, I only want to return.”

“You work hard for that. It is great. I…”

Tiffania said, choosing her words carefully.

“Even if you are not doing this for a person you love, you still had something to work hard on. However… I absent-mindedly wanted to just live quietly and stay out of trouble. Though I wanted to go to my mother’s hometown, I only thought about it, but never acted.”

“It’s not true. You are serious.”

“No. It is all because of my cowardly nature.”

Tiffania clasped Saito's hand.

“Thank you, Saito. I want to see more unique things. Before, I just lived in an old house… and then in this village for years, but now, for the first time, I want to see the world. The world is not just unpleasant things. There are also joyful things for sure… After seeing you, I realized that.”

Saito blushed.

“Hey, do you want to be my friend? My first… friend.”

“I do.”

“When you first came to the village, though I thought about erasing your memory… I didn’t. For a long time, I wanted a friend.”

“I see.”

Saito said, turning crimson for a while.

With his face close, he got a perfect sight of the valley of her breasts.

Noticing Saito's glance, Tiffania quickly pulled herself away.

“Sorry…”

“I-it’s all right. Since you are a friend, it is all right.”

An embarrassed silence followed.

“F-food is ready. Let’s eat.”

Saito nodded, and began to walk. From the house, a nice smell flowed, making Saito notice for the first time that he was hungry.

Chapter Eight: The Users of Void

After two weeks, the Nations Conference ended without too much trouble.

The result: Tristain and Germania claimed a vast territory in Albion and added it to their territory.

The remaining lands were under the joint rule of three countries: Tristain, Germania and Gallia, as it was decided to restore the monarchy. Therefore, the regions, including the capital city of Londinium, were managed by the three countries as a joint ruling territory.

As a ruler, Tristain's old noble Duke of Marcillac was recommended. He was aged and didn't have much ambition. His excellent domestic affair abilities made sure that the troubled Albion would be restored. From Germania and Gallia, representatives would be elected, and placed as the king's advisers.

And, with four countries taking part, the monarchy of Halkeginia was defended, the rise of republics stopped, and the monarchic alliance of four countries was announced.

If a new believer in democratic ideology started to cause a revolution in a kingdom, the other three countries would be allowed to start military intervention. As a result, new attempts at revolution would be noticed by the four governments at the same time.

With the establishment of this alliance, the nations conference was closed.

They were told to return to their countries tomorrow…

In Havilland palace, Henrietta was desperately looking over documents. Cardinal Mazarin could be seen next to her.

"Your Majesty, get some rest already… Lately you hardly sleep."

Henrietta attended the Nations Conference almost round-the-clock. For Tristain’s interests, she took part in heated discussions. Albrecht the III concluded in a whisper, "Not accepting the marriage was the correct choice."

“Even if we return home, there will be piles of work. I want to do as much as possible.”

“However, it is already 12 o'clock.”

“I will rest later.”

However, the Queen did not go the bed.

“Leave such table work to the secretary…”

“I want to look over everything. Otherwise, there would have been no point of coming on the cloud.”

Mazarin sighed. Because Henrietta was so young, he couldn’t help but worry. However… Mazarin watched Henrietta through half-way closed eyes. He wanted to keep the princess, whom he had watched over since she was just a baby, out of danger forever.

As if preparing to lecture a student, Mazarin cleared his throat.

“Your Majesty, as I have said repeatedly, we have to be careful of Gallia.”

“Uhum.”

Henrietta nodded, not lifting her face from the documents.

“Though it was… Gallia that brought an end to this war. Yet, their demands were insignificant… They only wanted one port. Also their words, ‘All that we wanted we already obtained.’…”

In terms of direct control of territory, Tristain and Germania obtained a considerable amount, but Gallia did not want it. Mazarin was suspicious of Gallia’s disinterest.

“Indeed.”

Henrietta nodded.

“Fuaah.” Mazarin let out a big yawn.

“You seem to be sleepy. Please take some rest.”

“No… I won’t leave until Your Majesty goes to bed.”

Henrietta smiled, putting away the documents.

“Will you get some rest?”

“Yes. Because I cannot risk your health.”

“Stay healthy not just for me. Sleeping is also part of work.”

“Yes,” Henrietta nodded obediently.

Then… reassured, Mazarin left. Girlishly, Henrietta fell onto the bed. And muttered absent-minded…

“Tired…”

Right now, she could sleep like the dead. But, there was one thing left to do before that. An act which became every days custom before sleep.

Henrietta pulled out a rope next to her pillow.

At once… a court lady appeared in front of the door.

“You called, Your Majesty?”

“Did Agnes return?”

“The Musketeer Commander, Agnes–sama, hasn't returned yet.”

“I see. Thank you.”

After hearing the footsteps of the court lady disappear, Henrietta shut her eyes tight. Like a child, she bit her fingernail. Looking troubled, Henrietta buried her face into the pillow, with her eyes closed.

At that time, in another room of the Havilland palace…

A lord sitting with his back to a burning fireplace, with his elbow placed on the sofa‘s armchair, was watching the guest with great interest.

“Hmm, what does the great ambassador of Romalia want from the ‘incapable king’ of Gallia?”

King Joseph, while giving a barely contained smile, looked down at the ambassador of Romalia who had "A personal message from the Pope".

He had outstanding blond hair… It was Julio.

While kneeling on one knee on the floor, he answered.

“Incapable king?… Your Majesty is far too modest.”

“Not modest at all. It is a fact that government and assembly officials, nobles too – they all laugh at me. Calling me ‘incapable’ in the shadows. If you look at it – the domestic affairs and country diplomacy is weird and wrong. Just like playing with a toy.”

“Your Majesty ended the war. History will remember your name as a great king.”

“Is such compliment of any value? I am not interested in history at all.”

Joseph took a music box that was on the table, and placed it on his hand. It was an old, worn-out music box. It was brown, with the varnish completely fallen off. It was cracked in some places. However, Joseph patted it dearly.

”Antiquary?”

“Aye. I received it from Albion’s royal family, an excellent article; it's called the ‘Founder's Music Box’.”

“The Founder's Treasure?”

Joseph's eyes shone.

“Precisely.”

“Romalia, Gallia, Tristain, and Albion… Each royal family received something called the Founder's Treasure.”

“I wonder what would happen if the people of Halkeginia were to learn about that?”

“And the ring of the four elements…”

“This one?”

Joseph showed Julio the ring on his finger.

“Indeed.”

“Hmm, so what business do you have? I am slowly getting sleepy. After all, conferences everyday are tiresome. Like that greedy lass, who never seems to get tired. I want you to be brief.”

“I’m afraid, though Your Majesty doesn’t like it much, it is connected with history. Those treasures, with the Founder’s will and blood were said to be placed in Romalia… And recently a certain prophecy was excavated.”

Joseph watched Julio evaluating him. So beautiful, that it made all words of description seem banal. Poets would have to invent new words for this… And his eyes, both different color, had a strong light in them.

This fellow… Julio Cesar named priest… to take part in the nations conference, he could be useful. He might be Romalia’s best man in terms of diplomacy.

“Fum. What prophecy?”

“The Founder's power was great. He divided his power into four parts, putting it into the treasures and rings. There were four people to keep it too. The Founder said, ‘Four treasures, four rings, four familiars, four users… when all four gather again, my Void power will awaken.’”

“What was that?! In other words, four users of Void exist?! Really?!”

Joseph laughed aloud.

“Stop saying foolish things! Users of Void, and four people at that! The Founder’s Void can be replaced by four people? This is a masterpiece!”

“It’s not a lie. Romalia collected true information. Two users' existences were confirmed.”

“Well, who?”

“I cannot tell. Only when I am convinced of Your Majesty’s cooperation, will I reveal it. ”

“What cooperation?”

“Well, that’s easy. As soon as you discover a user of Void, I want you to inform our country about it. Don’t worry. Our country doesn’t have great ambitions. However, we want to accompany the Founder's mind in the fullest sense… only that purpose. Royal alliance concluded today… The alliance between three kingdoms might correctly lead to the Founder’s true intention - one united country.”

“Tsk…” Joseph shook his blue head.

“About users of Void... I know nothing at all. Because I am an ‘incapable king’, the arriving vassals will not inform me about most essential things.”

“There is a way of discovering Void users. With one of the four rings, open the music box. If that person is a user, he will hear the Founder's melody.”

Joseph nodded.

“I agree. Let’s try it.”

“Well then…” Julio stood up.

“Wait.”

“What?”

“What about sharing Romalia’s true information of everything?”

“Because you are tired, so…”

“What, it may be just the right entertainment to kill ones' time during this long night.”

“I am sorry. But it is as I said – only when Your Majesty's cooperation is assured, will I get the the permission to reveal it.”

“Though young, the king is stronger than the pope.”

“More than others, he has more faith. Therefore, the corresponding level of faith from others is demanded.”

“Then are you saying - a faith like one in the Founder and God awakening?”

Julio gave a smile.

“This topic of Your Majesty’s interest is closed, but there’s another one.”

“Very well.”

“All substance in the world is made from small grains. Grains smaller than water drops or sand. As clarified in our recent theology, the four elements' spells control them.”

“Fuum.”

“But those grains are made from even smaller grains. It is said, that those smaller grains are what Void controls.”

"So what?"

“Following the Founder’s mind, and ‘four of four’ would gather… It would be a completely loose situation… in case of the complete Founder’s Void’s power resurrection, the Void spell might have a dreadful effect. Furthermore, the smallest grains' effect could be so big that it may change this world’s existence completely… In fact, there is such a spell mentioned in the prophecy.”

“What spell?”

Julio bowed.

“I would hate to obstruct Your Majesty’s rest any further.”

“Priests always seem to be ardent in propaganda.”

Julio, who tried to leave, was called back to stop by Joseph again.

“Wait.”

“Has your faith in the Founder’s and God’s truth been reignited?”

“I have a question concerning that faith. You, Romalia and these provoking Reconquista… is there any difference between you?”

With a smile on his lips, Joseph gave the profound question to priest.

“Reconquista was a disorderly crowd after all. They were just bunch of kids against the king. They used term ‘to recover sacred ground’ just to unite themselves. I don’t think they seriously thought about getting back the sacred ground from the elves.”

“…”

“Our Romalia is just trying to recover the sacred ground. Besides that, there are no other motives.”

Joseph buried his eyes into the Romalian’s.

“Against Elves' Ancient Magic used to control the sacred ground, there is only the Founder’s Void left as a counter. Well, in any case if we were to use it…”

Julio murmured to himself while turning to leave. Joseph said in a happy voice.

“You are mad.”

With his different-colored "moon eyes"’ shining, Julio answered gleefully,

“This is what faith is about.”

After Julio left, Joseph took up the doll from the table. The doll had a shape of a thin, brunette woman. After patting it dearly for a while, Joseph brought his mouth close.

“Did you hear it too, cute goddess? Yeah! That’s the right thing you heard! Romalia still does not know truth about us. The fellows that were running after the Founder’s tail for thousands of years, still do not have enough knowledge!”

Joseph brought his ear close to the doll.

“That’s right! It’s like you say, Myoz! They have information, but not the tools. Haha, in this game, we have an unquestionable advantage. The Ruby of Earth, the Founder‘s Censer, the Founder‘s Music Box… three parts are already ours. Aye, Tristain has three too… but they do not have the information. With the knowledge about prophecy and Albion‘s royal family treasure, it could be worrisome. Yet that lass is only interested in money and land. Haha, stupid beyond help! In other words, only we have information and tools. It‘s more than anyone else has.”

Joseph shut his mouth.

“What? Is that so?! Tristain’s user is coming to Albion? Moreover, alone? It’s like a chicken waiting to be cooked! Capture it immediately. We need to get the Founder’s Prayer Book and the Ruby of Water, before Romalian raccoon-dogs do. Hurry up!”

After giving instructions to the doll, Joseph sank into the sofa.

It seemed like he would be able to sleep well tonight.

Joseph, opened the lid of the Founder's Music Box, which was on table’s left.

And… closed his eyes.

After a while, the door next to his bedroom opened. Mrs. Moliere, in slovenly night clothes, showed up.

“Your Majesty, did the guest leave?”

“Aye.”

“Such a rude person, barging in, in the middle of the night! I hate that priest! Just because they believe in the Founder and God, they think they can obstruct lovers!”

Mrs. Moliere ran her hand up Joseph’s neck. And combined hair in lover’s way.

“Hey, Your Majesty. Is it all right?”

“What?”

“You always listen to that music box… Isn’t it broken though? I can not hear anything. Maybe I should have a master to mend it? I know a master with good, crafty hands, who makes me nice jewels. Now, look at this godly necklace. When it comes to that, he is really skillful…”

Joseph interrupted Mrs. Moliere's chat with an annoyed waving.

“You are impeding the appreciation of a beautiful experience. Shut up.”

“…But, I-“

“Let me listen.”

On his finger… in a vivid brown color, the Ruby of Earth shone.

Louise and Siesta arrived to Rosais on the third week of February, it was the fourth day of the Eoro week, and an evening of Raag day.

Usually, it would take twice as much time.

The shipping service between the Albion continent and Halkeginia had many people to serve. There were long lines of people who waited their turn to leave to Albion from the port in La Rochelle.

Unless one uses Her Majesty’s commission to get on board of a private ship.

This way, Louise interrupted the regular order of flights, and arrived in Rosais in just one week.

Louise, upon arriving at Albion, was amazed again.

The reason for that was that port Rosais was even more overcrowded than La Rochelle.

Peddling merchants whose business was war in Albion, speculators trying to get rich, government officials, people who were visiting the ones that they could not due to the war… it was overflowed with big crowds of people from all over Halkeginia.

“So many.”

Louise, who descended from the port, muttered and sighed. From the port, the road to the city was framed with arsenals and commanders, like an exposition of Halkeginia.

Along side the road, a lot of people stood with wooden signs with names on them.

“What are those names?”

Wearing an apron and coat taken from the Academy of Magic's housemaid clothes, Siesta stuck out from under her cap and asked, wondering. She was carrying a big bag over her shoulder. It was packed with their traveling needs.

“They are looking for people who have gone missing during the war.”

Louise said in a sad voice. Though she was wearing the usual Academy of Magic uniform, she had a big leather rucksack over her shoulders as well.

“I wonder if we’ll find… Saito-san.”

Their only clue was an order note given to Louise. There, it was written:

“Stop the enemy at the northeast hill, 50 leagues away from Rosais.”

Though she inquired to the army about the missing Saito, no clues were

obtained. Though she thought about meeting Henrietta, she was not in the royal palace. Seems like she went to some conference in Albion.

“Mo, after all, the only ones that we can rely upon are ourselves, right?”

“But, why couldn’t we borrow a horse?”

Looking at her, Siesta said,

“We go by foot, there is no distance we can not walk.”

She began to walk… while Louise slumped onto the ground.

“Auu…”

Because she was dragging a heavy bag since she came here, her body screamed.

“Pathetic.”

“We've been on foot since we left the ship. It’s late already, let’s stay for the night and start searching by tomorrow again. You have some stamina, don’t you?”

Saying that, Louise looked over at Siesta’s bag on her shoulder. It was three times bigger than Louise’s rucksack. She was carrying such a big bag, which looked to be heavy.

“I grew up in the countryside. It‘s nothing special,”

Siesta explained nonchalantly.

Of course, there were no rooms to rent. A lot of people that failed to get a room gathered around the hotels and spread their clothes there, preparing to sleep. Trying to find a vacant slot somewhere, led them to the front yard of the command base that Gallian fleet had blown off. The red brick rubble left by the bombardment looked miserable.

However, humans are so tough that even though a terrible incident had happened here, they could still open up a tent nonchalantly and rest for the night. Some were even selling red bricks as symbols of the end of the war.

Siesta took out a cloth from her bag and skillfully started to set up a tent. The poles were set, the cloth was set. A sleeping place for two people was made with surprising swiftness.

Then she collected a few bricks and, drawing few surprised looks, made an improvised kitchen. Then, after some rustling, she took a pan out of the bag and started preparing a stew.

After finishing, she placed it into the wooden bowl and hand it over to Louise.

“Please,”

“T-thank you.”

Louise looked suspiciously at the presented stew. She could not see the color of it. A peculiar aroma of mountain herbs and meat drifted.

Anxiously, Louise peeked inside…

“It's good, don’t worry. It’s my village’s special dish - Yosenabe.”

“Yosenabe?”

“Yes. A dish made by my great-grandfather.”

“Heee”

Louise timidly took one sip.

“Delicious!”

“Eheh. It suits everyone’s taste.”

Then Siesta muttered,

“My great-grandfather came from the same country as Saito-san.”

Louise popeyed.

“Really?”

“Yes. Umm… He came to this world with the ‘Dragon's Raiment’, 60 years ago…”

“Hm.”

Louise was surprised to see such a link between Siesta and Saito.

“You did not know?”

-nodnod- Louise nodded.

Siesta gave a smugly smile.

“Why are you smiling?”

“One thing that I win. Ehehehe.”

“Win what?! Hey!”

Thrusting herself towards Louise, Siesta began to sing a strange tune.

“Great-grandfather and your lover are from the same country♪, Same country, ♪Same country♪”

“Lover who?! Hey!”

When Louise boiled over and shouted, Siesta said in a triumphant voice.

“Kissed.”

“Wh-what?”

“A lot.”

Louise tightly clasped a fist. Losing her temper here would be what the enemy wanted her to do.

After taking a few deep breaths, she shook her head. Then slapped her own cheeks.

Then, desperately fighting for composure, she fixed her hair and placed her arms together.

“I-I did it a lot of times too. Or I should say, it was done to me.”

“Heeh. How many times?”

Asked Siesta with cold eyes.

“W-well… the first one was when we made familiar contract, sealed with a kiss.”

“A contract? It doesn’t count.”

Ignoring Siesta, Louise looked up.

“Then, the second time! On the dragon! It was when he kissed me while I was sleeping!”

“That’s impossible! Saito-san would never gloss over such thing!”

“Possible! Because, I was pretending to sleep!”

Louise declared triumphantly.

“What about it, he forcibly did it while I was sleeping! Then, why he was giving me, his master, those kind of looks – starestarestarestarestaaare. In bed, at the table, even in the classroom, everywhere! With perverted dog’s eyes too! Why would a servant force his master? When I was unaware too! Aren't those stuuupid ideas? Phui! Such feelings!”

Phui! Louise was showing off.

Siesta, watching Louise's exaggerated reaction, coldly and calmly delivered a blow.

“But if you were unaware, how can you know everything in such detail?”

Louise was at a loss of words.

“It wasn’t forced. You could resist, but you didn’t, right?”

Bulls-eye. However, she would not be Louise if she admitted it. Averting her eyes, she muttered to herself.

“I, I became numb.”

“Why did you become numb?”

“I was s-stung by a bee… Yes, a bee.”

“Think of a better lie next time!”

Not able to trick her, Louise decided to go on instead.

“Third time!”

However, the third time was certainly done by Louise herself. For some reason, she couldn’t resist while watching Saito’s sleeping face and kissed him. Therefore, Louise decided to skip the explanation.

“Fourth time!”

“Wait a moment! What happened with the third time?

“Nothing!”

“Not nothing! Explain it properly! Don’t lie!”

The fourth time happened on the shallop.

The reason they kissed that time… was because Louise said that he could touch her anywhere he wanted to, and then they kissed. Louise was worried. She decided to not explain it in full details to the maid again. Therefore, Louise skipped.

“Fifth time!”

Though as far as memory reached… there was no fifth time. To deceive, Louise

pointed her finger at Siesta.

“So this is it! I was kissed five times overall! No, I didn’t like it! I was embarrassed!”

Louise glared at Siesta with killer eyes.

However, Siesta didn’t give in to Louise’s stare and returned it.

“I did it seven times!”

“Yes?”

“During a single night, however.”

“Then it was a single time! A single one! After the sun rose, you were not kissed even once!

Siesta looked at Louise with fake sympathy, and, with triumph in her eyes, she dully stated.

“Please listen to me carefully. Don’t use a spell on me, ok?”

“What are you talking about?”

“Promise.”

“All right.”

“I used my tongue.”

Even Louise's ears crimsoned. Her body shook with anger.

The two kept looking daggers at each other for a while, and then sighed together.

Then, Siesta muttered.

“He is absolutely alive.”

Though Louise was looking down, she looked up at once.

“We have to believe it.”

“That’s right.”

Then it became silent…

The shouts of joy came from behind.

“Huh?”

When turning around, they saw a crowd gathered.

“What?”

When they approached it, they saw a lot of small dolls dancing on their feet. Knights, mercenaries, demi-humans, griffons and dragons… It appeared to be some kind of play.

“Alviss?"

Louise whispered silently

“What is Alviss?”

Siesta asked blankly.

“A gargoyle species.”

“Gargoyle?”

“Yes. Unlike Golems, these are magic dolls with their own will and movement. Alviss are said to be small ones. Hey, remember all those small statues standing in the school's dining room? Those are Alviss'. When night comes, they magically start to move and dance…”

On the other side of the dancing Alviss', a highroad artist could be seen. It was a beautiful woman with a big hood put on her head. Long black hair poked out from under her hood. She, without stirring, gazed at The Adventure of the Dancing Men.

The dance seemed to imitate the fight.

When a single fencer attacked dragons and mages, shouts of joy boiled from the viewers. Commoners received it well, when a fencer was the plot hero.

When the last dragon was knocked down, Fencer Alviss bowed to the viewers. All other mages and dragons stood up and bowed to the spectators as well. The people who gathered threw coins one after another and left. Siesta also took out of her pocket, one copper coin and threw it.

Then… Two Alviss' ran up to Siesta's feet and sat down demurely on her shoes.

“Ara, araarara. I can’t walk this way.”

Siesta quietly reached for them.

“Itta!”

Siesta gave a small yelp. She touched the sword of the fencer doll that began to move suddenly. Her finger got cut, and blood started dripping out.

“Don’t touch Alviss' with your hand.”

Louise kicked the doll to the ground with her feet.

“Let's go,” Louise urged Siesta, and they returned back to the tent.

Watching Louise’s and Siesta’s figures disappear, the hooded woman smiled.

Quietly, she lifted the hood up.

Ancient runes could be seen on her forehead.

When she gripped the Alviss', they started to shine.

It was Sheffield.

Chapter Nine: Myoznitnirn

Louise and Siesta were standing on the hill where Saito fought, looking down at the wide meadow below.

The morning sun rose from the other side of the mountain range, and light cracked through a crevice between the mountains, making the scenery more beautiful.

The previous day, both of them had walked almost 50 leagues. Even though the tent was put up and they slept at night, their legs still felt like a pair of sticks.

However, the spectacle before them was like medicine for their exhaustion.

With the mountain range far away, the faint fresh green grass was everywhere and contrasted it. It seemed unbelievable that this place, just one month ago, was a battlefield. The spectacle in front just could not be related with a tragic feast of iron, blood, and magic.

However, Saito held the enemy back, here.

"…Saito attacked 70,000 here."

Here, my shield took my place.

What was he thinking?

The wide forest line could be seen off to the side. After explaining the issue, Louise borrowed a map of Albion from the Academy of Magic, made by the Tristain Academy of Geography.

Siesta looked over her shoulder.

"This is a map of the whole Albion continent."

Louise cleared her throat and folded the map.

“I wonder if there is a village nearby…”

Siesta looked into the distance and pointed at the corner of the forest.

“There is a path there.”

There was a path that they didn't notice at night.

“It leads into the forest.”

“It’s easy to miss, but it doesn’t disappear within the forest.”

Though the path was not wide enough for a carriage to pass, it was wide enough for a person, and it seemed it was tread down rather firmly.

“Someone lives in there.”

Siesta said.

During those days…

In the forest of Westwood Village, Agnes and Saito set up their wooden swords.

Though Agnes said that technique was not important in war, she taught Saito some techniques. Techniques for rolling, cutting swords, and using swords; also the way to feint.

And now… Agnes talked about an "examination".

Saito was told to use all the tricks and techniques he was taught in this one.

“Then, I will call you by name.”

Until now, Saito has always been referred to as "dog".

“What is needed to be done?”

“Imitate actual combat, naturally.”

Then Saito inhaled deeply and lowered the sword.

“…What? This stance…”

Then Saito scooped the soil off the ground with the point of his sword, and threw it, aiming at Agnes's face.

“Teyaah!”

But… Agnes stood stone-still.

“Uh.”

“The soil won’t be caught into one’s eyes as easily as sand.”

“Sossu.”

Saito put on a serious look on his face and set up his sword.

And for a while, the feud continued.

“You are not charging in? Then, I will go.”

Agnes took a wide swing.

Fast… however, he did not hesitate.

Saito was moving according to it.

Once it started, he decided.

First, taking full-length swings with his sword…

Agnes taught him that striking from the beginning may not always pass. As taught, he kept dodging and adjusting his timing.

Therefore, long swings with the sword.

Bonnnn! The sound of a wooden sword hitting a shoulder echoed.

Garan! Followed by the sound of a wooden sword falling to the ground.

Saito dumbfounded, stared at his own hand.

It was firmly gripping the wooden sword.

Looking up… He saw Agnes kneeling on one knee and picking up the dropped sword.

“A-are you all right?!”

Saito ran up panicking. Agnes calmed Saito by standing up.

“I’m all right.”

After that, Agnes gave a smile.

“Surely, I'm matched with your sword's full-swings…”

“I thought it was the only chance of winning.”

Saito said in disbelief. He was really excited to be able to take out the musketeer commander.

“Moo, as promised, now I will call you by name, Faito.”

“It’s Saito.”

Said a disappointed Saito.

Leaning against a tree… Saito and Agnes were having some rest.

Agnes began to talk.

“Now then… since you passed the examination, I have one more thing to tell

you.”

Saito turned.

“What?”

“The techniques I taught you have one thing in common.”

“Fmm?”

“They are all useless.”

“What?”

“In actual combat, an opponent is not always armed with a sword. You’ll never know, it could occasionally be a spear or a gun. Or a frightening mage. It may not even be human to begin with. You will not know if it’s a magical beast or demi-human. Even more, it could not be a one on one situation to begin with. If so, how long could you hang in there dodging? Sword fighing is not always useful.”

“Then what…”

“What did you do when you attacked me the first time?”

“Erm… I swung and lowered the sword.”

“And?”

“I pierced.”

“That’s right. This is the basic movement of real combat: swing, lower, pierce. It is good. Yet, you have to adapt to the situation.”

“Situation?”

“First of all, a surprise attack. Try to hit from behind. If it fails, and you have to fight face to face, wait for a chance. Search for a chance. Create it if there is none.”

“…And when I cannot create one?”

“Give your life up.”

“Really?”

“No, in real combat if you think you are defeated, you will be defeated. Technique and skill are worth nothing without self-confidence. So fake it, convince the opponent that he won. Lure him out of reality. This is the essence of victory.”

“Then, now…”

Saito recalled Agnes's swinging. Somehow, it felt as if it lacked his usual speed. In other words, Agnes…

”Of course, the purpose of it was to build up your confidence. Yet, that technique was worthy of victory.“

Saito face glowed.

“Thank you!”

“Now if you understand – wash your face.”

As said, his face was covered with sweat and dirt.

“Yeees!”

Saito cheerfully ran up through the field towards the stream.

“Fuah,” Agnes sighed shaking her hand, and Derflinger, who was leaning against the tree, asked.

“Pretended, really?”

Staring at Derflinger,Agnes answered.

“…Mo, it is still too early to evaluate his progress. But he has already forged a year's worth of practice, that of a considerable fighter.”

“Of course. He has more actual battle experience than you do. Even if the head does not remember, the body still recalls the threat on his life.”

Agnes quietly watched her hand, and then shook her head.

“Well… I went 80 percent. Yes.”

“80 percent?”

“Well, I may have gone fierce and went out 90 percent. Maybe.”

“You too have an unyielding competitive spirit, huh?”

As Saito was washing his face in a stream... Tiffania ran up, accompanied by a small girl.

“What’s wrong?”

He asked Tiffania, who ran out of her breath.

“The Louise-san of whom Saito talked about, had pink hair and was a short girl?

“Y-yeah…”

While trying to figure out what was so urgent about it, Saito nodded.

“She has long-hair, small chest, is cute, but a very rude girl?”

Dumbfounded, Saito nodded.

“T-that’s right… what’s wrong?”

“Then, it could be Louise-san after all…”

“Eh?”

“Emma, while picking mushrooms in the forest, saw that person, together with another woman with black hair, walking.”

“Woman with black hair?”

“That person called her Siesta…”

“R-really?!”

Saito as shocked.

“Louise-san! Waah, she seems to be heading straight here! What to do!”

Louise?

Searching for me?

His chest was filled with various emotions. A huge desire entered his thoughts. It swelled like a balloon pumped with gas.

I want to meet her.

I want to meet her a lot.

Louise… his cute master, whom he protected for so long.

I want to meet her.

Tears started flowing.

That noble girl came to look for me.

Louise and Siesta reached Westwood Village.

They wandered half of the day following the footpath in the forest, which they entered from the highway that lead to the city of Saxe-Gotha. Fortunately, they found a girl who was gathering mushrooms.

But when they asked the five-year old girl “Have you seen a boy?” while describing Saito’s features, she ran away surprised.

Maybe they can find adults to talk to, the two thought. Then… they found this

village.

It was a tiny village, of only ten houses, hid well in a small glade within the forest…

“Is it a pioneer village? Yet, there doesn’t seem to be too much left after it was made…”

Siesta shared her impression.

“Let’s ask around.” Louise said, looking for an adult to talk to.

Then… a nice person showed up.

A girl placed a basket filled with vegetables down and stepped out of the house,

She was a beautiful girl with blond hair waving down from her wide hat.

“Um, can I ask you something?”

When Louise asked, the girl made a scared gesture.

“It’s all right. We are not anyone suspicious.”

Siesta impatiently asked.

“Um… have you seen a boy around here? He has a black hair like me… and is around seventeen years of age…”

The girl with the blond hair, turned her face sadly down. And saying “Come”… leading the pair back to the forest, to the opposite direction from which Louise and Siesta came.

“When I found him… It was already too late.”

The girl with blond hair, who introduced herself as Teifutenia, brought Louise and Siesta to the old oak tree. A big stone was placed there, decorated with blooming forest flowers.

And on it… Saito’s parka was placed.

Stupefied Siesta collapsed.

“He had injuries from magic and the bullets all over his body. Look… this cloth. It’s worn out, right? His body was the same. It was hard to look at it. It wasn’t a pleasant sight. The strongest Water spells would not have healed him.”

Siesta began to cry and tightly embraced the grave.

“Why… why did you die… I told you to run away…”

Seeing Siesta acting like that, Tiffania continued to talk painfully.

“And… in the end… that person who found him, said that he had something to say.”

“What did he say?”

Louise asked in distant voice.

“Please forget.”

“That’s all?”

Tiffania nodded.

Then, she held sobbing Siesta’s shoulder.

“It’s getting cold… please, at least, come to my house. Spend a night in there.”

Siesta, unthinkingly stood up.

“You too… please come. It is getting cold.”

Though she said so, Louise did not answer. She just quietly… stared at Saito’s parka.

Tiffania shook her head and said to Louise.

“Well, we’ll wait in the house…”

Left alone at the tombstone, Louise lifted Saito’s parka up.

Then she gently pressed her lips against it.

“Saito… can you hear me? First of all, I’d like to thank you. All right?”

Of course there was no answer.

“When I was about to be crushed by Fouquet's golem… and when I was about to be killed by Wardes… you always saved me. When the Albion fleet attacked Tristain. When the Princess was reckless, when… I was ordered to stop Albion's army of 70,000 from advancing - you always stood in front of me. Even when I was selfish, demanding and bossy – you always protected me without fail until the very end. Even though I complained, you saved me.”

And… Louise continued to pour words.

“You said you liked me. Do you know how happy that made me? You said 'I love you' to someone like me. I am not pretty and I am not a girl to whom one says 'I love you', only you did.”

Louise closed her eyes.

“To you, I wanted to say those words. But in the end, because of my pride, I couldn’t say… those important words.”

Louise lifted her hand up to her chest and pressed it to her heart.

“But, I won’t say them here. I will say them once we meet again. Until then, I will never give up. Even if everyone says you're dead… even if the spells show you are dead… even if your grave stands before my eyes, I won’t believe it. I’ll wait for you for the rest of my life. But, even that won’t repay the things that you did for me. I will call you back to life. Even if I’ll be called stupid, I will wait for you. With all my being, I will deny your death.”

Louise put on Saito’s parka.

“I am a mage. I have the power to turn words into reality. Therefore, I say - I won’t admit your death.”

Louise softly gazed at Saito‘s tombstone and said.

“We will meet sometime. We will meet for sure. I believe.”

Squating down on the back side of an oak, Saito heard the footsteps of Louise leaving. Next to him there, was Agnes, who helped to make the grave.

“Are you sure?”

Agnes placed her hand on Saito’s shoulder, who had his face buried in his knees.

Saito nodded.

“I am sure. I am not Gandálfr and I cannot protect Louise, so…”

“I see,” Agnes said…

And kept quietly patting the head of the silently sobbing Saito.

That night… Louise and Siesta stayed over at Tiffania's house.

Louise got the room where Saito used to sleep, while Siesta slept in Tiffania’s room. Tiffania moved to sleep in the living room. She offered the beds to the tired travelers.

Louise laid in the bed where Saito was sleeping before, quietly staring at the ceiling.

She silently drew the blanket to her nose.

It smelled like Saito’s smell.

If I don’t do anything, I will go crazy for sure. She tried to think about something to steady herself. But, the voice of regret and blame, brought back the images of Saito over and over again to Louise’s mind.

It was hard, it was painful. It hurt so much in various ways. She couldn’t bear it much longer.

It seemed like another restless night without a wink of sleep awaited her…

The door opened.

“Siesta?”

It was indeed Siesta.

“What’s wrong? You couldn’t fall asleep as well?”

Siesta shook her head. Her body was trembling.

“Wha-what happened to you?”

“Saito-san…”

Louise sprang to her feet from the bed.

“What about Saito? Hey!”

“In the forest…”

“Forest!”

Louise rushed out, gripping the Founder's Prayer Book. *Saito was alive after all!* Was the only thought she had. She wasn't alerted by Siesta's tone.

“Which way?”

“T-that way.”

Louise started to run after Siesta.

The light of the two moons falling through the openings between the trees was

their only signpost.

Their feet were almost completely covered with darkness.

Louise fell down many times. However, Siesta, as one would expect from a peasant girl, accustomed to the forest, went fast ahead.

“W-wait…”

By that time, Siesta’s silhouette was swallowed by the forest darkness.

“I'm here!”

Only her voice could be heard in the dark.

Desperately, Louise ran after that voice.

Meanwhile, the moon came out and illuminated the opening. Everything shone under the silver light. Even mushrooms looked like they were glowing.

Siesta stood up and looked at something.

“Hey, Saito-san is there…”

“Where?”

Though her eyes were searching frantically, she could not see Saito anywhere.

Can’t she see because of the darkness?

Impatiently, she tried to recite ‘light’ spell, but then…

Siesta gripped the leash of the bag on her shoulder with Founder's Prayer Book in it.

“Hey! What are-!”

However, Siesta didn't change her expression. With a strange smile on her lips she continued to pull it forcefully.

“You… are you being controlled?”

Seeing an odd sparkling in her eyes, Louise kicked Siesta away. If so, she could not afford to hold down at a time like this. Siesta fell to the ground.

Louise promptly pulled out the wand that was attached to her thigh.

Quickly, she started to chant:

'Dispel Magic'.

Because the spell cast time was short, the range was very narrow as well. Yet, it was enough to put Siesta under Dispel.

Siesta's entire body became covered with light.

She is indeed controlled by some spell.… she thought.

"…No it is not a control spell."

Siesta suddenly disappeared. What on earth?

Louise blankly stared at the empty space where Siesta was lying.

Then… she saw a small doll lying there.

She saw that doll before.

The other day, back in Rosais… it was the same doll playing a hero.

"Alviss…"

Indeed.

It was a downsized version of a gargoyle, moving on its own will due to the influence of magic.

So why was it here?

Hearing footsteps echoing behind her, Louise turned around.

"…Who?"

It was a black shadow, covered with a black robe. The shape was one of a woman. Louise recalled the figure of the highroad artist in Rosais.

It was her.

“What are you trying to do? Who are you?”

Louise at the same time set up her wand and started to chant.

“Identify yourself.”

“Well… what do you think my name is?”

“Stop joking.”

“You don’t know me as it seems, I introduce myself as Sheffield. Yet, it is not my real name.”

Louise uttered a spell.

“Explode…”

The spell was unleashed at once. The explosion launched towards the woman in black robe.

However, after the spell hit the robe, she was not there anymore. When she came closer she saw another small doll lying there. Apparently, Alviss, with the help of magic, could become human-sized.

“That’s cheating! Show yourself!”

Then…

From the dark, many women clothed in black robes showed up.

She couldn’t tell which of them were Alviss' and which was the real highroad artist.

All of the black robed women opened their mouths at once.

“Nice to meet you, Miss Vallière. User of the great Void.”

She knew that I am Void's user, just who is this woman?

“…Gargoyle user?”

“I can use more than gargoyles.”

Louise tried to chant the cantrip.

She was going to finish Dispel Magic in a dash.

“Stop. Your spell is useless against my dolls.”

Suddenly… the women clothed in black robes turned into many knights - gargoyles.

One after another, the number of dolls increased. Their swords and spears… were looking frightening.

Surrounded by tens of gargoyles, the woman, who called herself Sheffield, muttered.

“Shall I teach you about my ability?”

“Ku…”

“God's left hand, your Gandálfr, can use all weapons. Right?”

Louise did nothing, but silently glared at Sheffield.

How does she know that?

And who is this woman that knows it?

“I am god’s mind, Myoznitnirn. I can use all magical items.“

Myoznitnirn?

Though not a mage, she can use all magical items?

Are gargoyles moving because of that ability?

Unlike Golems, which require constant control after creation, gargoyles move by their own will. Therefore, the corresponding spell is needed. Using a great number of gargoyles at the same time is impossible even for an experienced mage. How did this woman have so much magical power?

The woman in a black robe, abruptly took off her hood.

Characters where shining on her forehead.

Ancient runes. It had been some time since Louise saw those.

The runes imprinted on Saito’s left hand…

“Do these ancient runes look familiar?

Louise’s face turned pale.

“You…”

“Indeed, I am a familiar of Void.”

Chapter Ten: Swordsman

Meanwhile…

At Emma’s house, Saito, who wasn't able to fall asleep, was spending the night with Agnes. Because Louise was staying at Tiffania’s house, Saito lost his lodging. In only a single room, Saito and Agnes were sitting at the table. In the bed nearby, Emma was already asleep.

“So, you don’t have the ability to protect her?”

Agnes muttered after listening to Saito’s story.

“…Aye. Because I am not Gandálfr anymore.”

After thinking for a while, Agnes asked…

“You were defending Miss Vallière because you were Gandálfr?”

“Indeed. Because I was Gandálfr, I could protect Louise.”

“That’s not it.”

“Eh?”

“It is not the meaning I was implying. It was a question about will. There is a different meaning between ‘able to protect due to being a Gandálfr’ and ‘protecting due to being a Gandálfr’.”

Saito was startled.

“So, who was protecting Miss Vallière? Was it Gandálfr? Or Saito Hiraga? That’s what I want to hear.”

“That…”

Saito looked hesitant before answering.

“It’s easy to belittle oneself. It’s easy to mutter ‘I can’t’ and give up one’s courage. But…”

Agnes continued.

“To risk your life for a woman, is worth a whole lifetime.”

Looking at Sheffield, who introduced herself as a Void familiar, Louise asked,

“…Is it some kind of bad joke. How can there be another Void familiar."

“It is up to you to believe or not. You are free to not believe me. It’s your choice. Now, be obedient and give me that Founder’s Prayer Book…”

Louise responded with a bitter expression,

“…And if I would oppose you, you’d knock me down and take it?”

“Not so harshly.”

“Stop joking!”

She pointed her wand and unleashed a small explosion towards the woman with robe.

Yet, it was also a gargoyle.

Another one opened its mouth.

“This is a doll, not a gargoyle. It’s a special ancient magic item that can take the shape of a person, whose blood they get to drink. This ability… Was used by kings in ancient wars. Some noble historians compare it to a play. Well, we want to thank you.”

Gargoyles approached slowly.

“They are not very useful against swordsmen and soldiers. But because of their usefulness against mages, in history, they are feared as ‘mage killers’.”

“Ku!”

Louise again unleashed Dispel Magic at the approaching beings.

However… it was a futile attempt of resistance against such overwhelming numbers.

A Void spell's power is proportional to the time it takes to cast. Yet… she couldn't make long chants. During casting, a mage is defenseless. She would be easily caught by an enemy.

“So, what do you say? Join in the war game! Just think about it! How long can you keep doing cancellation spells? Here!”

All the gargoyles turned into swordsmen.

There was nothing she could do about it; Louise ran away.

“Aahaha! Strange! Are you really a Void user? Without your Gandálfr, you can’t even chant a spell!”

Louise ran, trying to escape back to the forest. Behind her, Myoznitnirn's magic dolls followed her. Seems like they wanted to tease, or maybe measure Louise’s ability, since they followed Louise at her own pace.

Her feet stumbled on a tree root and Louise fell down.

“Hurts…”

From the other side, thick shadows and damp footsteps of gargoyles stepping through the forest soil echoed.

Fear struck her.

Yet… with her mind stricken with terror, what escaped her mouth was not a Void spell, nor a prayer to God, but…

“Saito!”

The name of the familiar that no longer existed in this world.

In a weeping voice, Louise cried,

“Help… Help me Saito…”

Damp footsteps echoed closer.

The rational part of her mind denied Saito being alive.

Abandon this belief… Saito is dead.

Give up.

Give up, Louise.

Your familiar is dead!

Louise bit her lip.

“So what...”

She knew that already.

Louise screamed in crying voice.

“So what! Sowhatsowhat!”

She could not allow her mind to whisper about his death.

“Everyone keeps telling he is dead, dead, dead… I KNOW that already! He’s dead!”

Louise stood up.

And began to utter an incantation.

The ancient words escaped Louise’s lips. It was a common magic spell, that everyone can use.

“I, Louise Françoise Le Blanc de La Vallière…”

She knew.

This was not a spell one should cast at a time like this.

What should have been recited were… Void spells.

However, she decided to believe in it.

And to trust in it.

With her life at stake… she placed her trust into his name.

Louise decided deep inside…

She believed.

Because, I still have not said those words.

Louise recited the spell to meet Saito and shouted.

“In the name of the great Five Pentagon Powers! Following my fate, summon a familiar!”

Louise lowered her wand.

In front of Saito, who was sitting, holding his knees… the gate opened.

The gate that he saw in Tokyo some time ago.

Saito stared with a blank surprise all over his face.

“This…”

Derflinger said in a casual voice.

“…Haa, seems like your fate is to become that lass’s familiar after all.”

“But…”

“Well, Contract Servant doesn’t necessarily succeed.”

“It’s not the time for such talks.”

Agnes said pointing at the gate. Louise's scream echoed from the inside.

“Come! Come come! Help! Noo!”

“…So, what are you going to do now, partner?”

When Derflinger was finishing saying that… he was pulled up by Saito.

“Mo, so be it. But mate, it is your life tha-…”

Saito grabbed Derflinger, who was still muttering, and jumped into the gate.

On the other side of the gate, in the darkness, gargoyles appeared.

But, Louise was not trembling.

She was engulfed by a warm feeling.

He will come.

Saito will come.

Because I am about to die… Saito will come and rescue me.

Encircling Louise at the gate, one of gargoyles raised a sword.

At that moment… the gargoyles upper body crumbled down.

The first thing that caught Louise's eyes was Derflinger.

Then, she saw the black hair she had seen so many times… Louise felt the tears that she was holding back for so long started to flow.

The moment when Saito came out of the gate, he was greeted by the sight of a fencer lowering his sword. Fearlessly, Saito avoided the swing and thrust Derflinger forward.

Taking his chance, he pierced and cut down the fencer.

From the back… he could hear nostalgic sounds of Louise crying and snarling at the same time.

"W-w-w-where were you!"

Though Saito wanted to calm down Louise, the only words that came were "Wa-was away for a bit…" - truly pathetic response.

Louise started pouring out words in a frenzy.

"You are my Gandálfr! Don't go anywhere and protect me! D-defend…"

Ignoring his feelings, he said…

"Shut up, stupid!"

"Who are you calling stupid?!"

“It's all right now, so calm down.”

“What was that?!”

From the darkness, Myoznitnirn, Sheffield's voice rang.

“Hey, hey. Gandáflr showed up? Aren’t you a little late. Where were you loafing?“

“I'm not Gandálfr.”

“Then who are you?”

“A free earthling.”

“What? And I thought that I was able to meet a companion… pity.”

Hearing this exchange between Saito and Sheffield, Louise shouted,

“W-what do you mean?!”

“As I said. I am not Gandálfr now.”

“Ha? Why?”

“The runes disappeared because I was close to death.”

“Are you s-s-ss-stupid! Why did you come through the gate!”

“Shut up. I am not protecting you because I am Gandálfr.”

“What other reason?!”

“I protect you because I love you!”

Louise's face crimsoned. Even at such time, Louise blushed furiously.

She coughed to clear her throat and said…

“Th-then, anyway… lets do the Contract Servant again…”

“We don’t have much time for that. Just chant the Void spell and do not worry, I will win somehow.”

“What are you saying?! Not being a Gandálfr, what can you do with gargoyles as your opponents…”

“Gargoyles?”

“Magic dolls.”

“I see. So they are not human. I won’t hold back then.”

The crowd of gargoyles closed in.

For a while, they were eying them.

Saito set up the sword.

“It’s all right, entrust me with your life.”

Hearing him say that in such confident way… Louise bit her lip. And rubbed her eyes.

She was happy.

Concentrating on her wand, Louise began to chant the spell.

Hearing the nostalgic Void chant from behind him, Saito faced the direction from which the enemies were coming.

From the darkness, another gargoyle, dressed in a differently shaped armor, jumped towards him. He dodged the enemy's attack in a dash and jumped back.

He was looking at the enemy’s foot position.

It was time, for the intensive training he had with Agnes to start repaying, Saito thought.

“Follow the feet…”

After dodging several times, he understood the pattern of the enemy's attack.

Then, when the enemy lifted it's sword and was about to bring it down, Saito thrust decisively.

The shoulder of the gargoyle was torn and the sword fell to the ground.

“Ah, I hit it!”

Saito’s hands shook with excitement as he cut another gargoyle down.

However, though he was pleased about the hits… more enemies popped up one after another.

“Damn…”

He remembered Agnes’s words:

“Avoid situations where you have to fight more than one on one.”

He thought about escaping, but heard Louise chanting from the back.

She said she entrusted her life to Saito.

She entrusted her life not to Gandálfr, but to Saito Hiraga.

Even if cost him his life, he wouldn’t let her down.

Taking a breath, he mustered his courage.

The enemies approached.

Towards him.

Derflinger, who had kept silent till now, opened his mouth.

“Partner, I ask you. Just now, you cut down two enemies at the same time. Don’t you understand? You are a simple mortal; you can’t attack two gargoyles at the same time.”

“Aye.”

“Have confidence. You are strong. Just listen to my instructions now. Follow

them, all right? If you do so, you can surely win.”

“Yeah.”

Derflinger's confident voice calmed Saito down.

“Center.”

A gargoyle with a spear attacked him.

“To the right.”

Following Derflinger’s instructions, Saito dodged to the right.

Pon – the spear hit the place where Saito stood just a moment ago. Taking the chance, Saito cut it down.

“On the right. Squat down. Cut away the feet.”

He squatted down.

The gargoyle's sword sliced through the place where Saito’s head was a few moments ago. Still squatting, he swung his sword and cut down the dolls legs, leaving it lying on the ground.

“On the right. Round up.”

Saito rounded up to the standing position and hit the gargoyle’s groin with his sword.

“Turn around, cut.”

He turned around. Though the spear was aimed right to his face, he was not afraid anymore.

At the same time, he turned around the sword with a wide swing, cutting the gargoyle from the back into half.

The remaining one lifted up its sword.

”Block!”

Seeing an opening, Saito pierced.

“Idiot! Don’t pierce!”

Though Derflinger shouted, Saito already pierced the gargoyle, pinning it with the sword to a tree

“Seventh!”

Saito shouted happily in excitement.

“Hey, pull out!”

“Haven’t I told you?! Never pierce against many opponents!”

A new one appeared there, Saito fell into panic.

“W-what do I do?!”

“It’s too late! The end! Good-bye!”

“T-that!”

Though Saito tried to pull out the stuck sword using his leg, it didn't came out.

The new doll jumped up at Saito.

At that moment, there was a gun shot. The doll collapsed right before Saito’s face.

“What was that?”

Then he saw Agnes standing there, holding a pistol.

“Agnes-san!”

Then Agnes threw away the pistol, and pulled out another one from under her belt and aimed at him. Another shot, and the gargoyle next to him fell.

With much effort, Saito finally was able to pull out Derflinger.

Having already used her both pistols, Agnes pulled out her sword.

“Come on.” She faced Saito raising her jaw.

Reassured by her presence, Saito felt his courage rising again.

However, another gargoyle appeared from the other side and approached the still-chanting Louise.

Even though he instantly ran, it didn’t look like he was going to make it there on time.

If he were a Gandálfr, he could make it on time! It was the first time he regretted not being it… *Blonk!* something knocked against the gargoyle’s head.

A frying-pan.

Slowly, the gargoyle crumbled to the ground.

Behind Louise, dressed in nightclothes and trembling, stood Siesta. Apparently she threw a frying-pan at the gargoyle that was approaching Louise.

“Siesta!”

“Ah, I hit it…”

Then, noticing Saito, Siesta’s face started to glow with joy.

“I couldn't fall asleep, and when I looked out of the window… I saw this girl running without protection with a different expression on her face, so I followed! And then Saito-san! Waah waah! Waaah!”

Seeing Siesta sobbing, taken by emotions, Saito tightened his grip on Derflinger again.

He didn’t show any surprise upon seeing Siesta in such a distant place.

Saito leaped towards the place where Agnes had her sword crossed with three gargoyles.

Due to the training… Agnes' and the gargoyles' movements seemed slow

somehow.

Though it wasn’t on the same level as with Gandálfr's power of course, it was enough.

It didn’t take much time for Saito and the others to knock down the three remaining gargoyles.

Within the darkness, Sheffield was perplexed.

Those three were mere humans.

Yet… the two fencers cut Sheffield’s gargoyles one after another.

Though the woman seemed to be a skillful warrior… it was the boy that surprised Sheffield the most.

His movements seemed to grow in pace whenever he hit a gargoyle.

As if he stopped thinking about his movements, and was just smoothly swinging his sword.

“Hmmm… this must be Gandálfr’s inheritance. On the same level as I. Tough one.”

Sheffield, like a predator watching her prey and with a smile on her lips, followed the fight.

After a moment, her expression changed.

Sheffield, with the face of a girl in love, shouted,

“Joseph-sama!”

Then her face clouded.

“But why? If I would take it really seriously, I could take them down at once!”

After a few words said in her mind, she smiled again.

“I see. You enjoy the game? Indeed… Void against Void. After all, this is what makes me and Joseph-sama similar… I’ll simply collect rings and treasures for now. Then, in the end, I will measure that user's power. Because you can’t make her into a game partner if you do not closely measure it…”

Louise released the ancient spell.

A wave of Void rippled through the place.

She gathered it with all of her will powers' limit… and released it.

The long spell ended, the cantrip was completed.

'Dispel Magic'.

All gargoyles were wrapped up by this magic… which like "even smaller grains" canceled the effect of the spell that made the dolls move.

All the former gargoyles… changed back to Alviss.

Then, as if put under the Silence spell, the forest immediately became quiet once again.

Epilogue

“My name is Louise Françoise Le Blanc de La Vallière. Pentagon of the Five Elemental Powers, bless this humble being, and make him my familiar.”

In the living room of Tiffania's house, Contract Servant was completed.

Though they searched in the forest… the woman in a black robe, who introduced herself as Sheffield, was gone. Only a large number of Alviss' were lying around.

When Louise and the others returned to Tiffania’s house… they decided to give another "contract" to Saito. If they were attacked again like a few moments ago, it might get serious after all.

Siesta and Tiffania watched Saito's contracting with Louise with worried expressions. Agnes, with her arms crossed, was nonchalantly watching what the mage was doing.

“I guess he's willing to become a mage’s tool again. The runes make the sword training useless.”

“Maybe…”

Derflinger, who was leaning against the sofa, said in a somewhat painful voice. Agnes looked up at Derflinger surprised.

“Why so gloomy. Isn’t your partner coming back?”

Not answering Agnes’ question, Derflinger remained silent.

Once the spell ended, Louise brought her lips to Saito’s.

Saito watched at her thin, but nicely shaped lips.

When you think about it… everything started from here.

Various adventures crossed his mind.

After this, a new adventure might start from here. With his hopes and fears in turmoil, Saito stirred a little. Seeing Saito acting this way, Louise asked him.

“You won’t regret it?”

Saito, gazing straight into Louise’s eyes, said.

“I have already decided it when I passed the gate.”

Louise nodded, and slowly pressed her lips against Saito’s.

At once… a burning pain hit his body.

“Guaaaaaah!”

Siesta tried to run up to Saito, who was rolling in agony.

“S-Saito-san!”

“I-it’s all right… it’s just the runes of the familiar being carved in…”

Both, Saito and Louise, said at the same time.

And at once the pain subdued.

Saito watched curves appearing on his left hand.

“Haah…” he moaned. Louise shut her eyes and pressed herself closer to Saito.

“D-did it fail?”

“No… it succeeded.”

Saito showed Louise his left hand’s top.

Gandálfr's runes were firmly carved.

Louise gently traced each rune with her finger. *This character string… is a bond between me and Saito.* While caressing them… the amount of time when they were separated, the despair she felt, she was overflowed by the feelings.

Though everyone were still there, Louise desperately clung tightly onto Saito… and buried her face below his chest. And stayed like that, not moving. Saito gently held Louise's shoulders.

Everyone stared at the couple.

"Well, as I said, I need to sharpen my sword for the battle," Agnes muttered.

Though Siesta lifted up her eyes for a moment, she gave out a smile in the end.

The innocent Tiffania blushed.

"Your left hand… don't stress it too much… I can't help but worry."

Derflinger muttered so silently that no one heard.

The awkward atmosphere hung around for a while…

Tiffania, after saying, "Well, I'm sure you need various things to discuss," hurriedly dashed out of the bedroom.

Siesta came up to Louise and muttered quietly in her ear.

"…Only for today, I will lend him to you."

…And left as fast as Tiffania left the room.

When Derflinger tried to say something, he was gripped by Agnes.

"All right, you also have to go."

Finally alone, Saito and Louise gazed at each other in silence.

While they were looking at each other… tears started to fall from Louise's eyes.

"Louise."

When Saito unconsciously hugged her shoulders tighter, even more tears started to fall from her eyes. Not wiping them, Louise opened her mouth.

“Th…”

“Th?”

“Thth….”

“Thth?”

“Th-thought I will never be able to meet you again…”

While looking straight at him Louise sobbed.

“I-I…thought I, gu, had something important to t-t-tell, you, gu, went somewhere…”

Her speech overflowed with her feelings.

“You didn't show up on the ship, you didn't show up in the bed, back at home… Do you know how worried I was?.. I couldn’t take it anymore… I couldn’t take it because…”

Louise was heavily pulling out words mixed with tears. Though she was incoherent and hard to understand, Louise’s feelings poured right into Saito’s heart.

“But y-you visited me in my dreams… you were gentle, and, and…”

“D-don’t cry…”

Saito hugged Louise tightly, encircling her head with his hand. Louise started to weep more bitterly.

“Cruel… You left me alone, cruel…”

“I won’t leave,”

Saito said.

“I won’t leave you any more.”

When he said those words… he remembered how it hurt him so badly as well, since the runes disappeared.

“Don't go anywhere again.”

“Aye.”

“S-stay by me.”

“Aye.”

Saito nodded many times.

The inside of his nose started to tickle.

That’s right, this is what I really wanted to do from the beginning.

Since I was not Louise’s Gandálfr, though I wanted to protect her… I misunderstood. I thought that not being a Gandálfr, I couldn't protect her.

But, I was wrong.

I can protect you, Louise.

Not someone else, me… I want to protect you.

As he thought this, something warm spread inside Saito’s heart.

This warmth made Saito more determined.

Some day, I might return.

But… not until I make Louise happy.

For the master who needs me so much, I will pursue her dreams.

When he was determined like that, everything seemed simple.

Louise was still crying.

“Y-you can look at other girls… You can touch them… You can k-k-k-kiss them, but… don’t go anywhere…”

Louise kept on crying for a while.

Louise, who finished crying some time ago and now had red and puffy eyes, was silent.

When he laid her down in bed, she laid down obediently. Yet, she gripped onto Saito’s sleeve and did not let it go. And pulled it down while biting her lips. So, Saito had to lie down next to her. Louise immediately placed her head gently on his shoulder.

He could smell the nostalgic aroma of Louise’s hair.

Louise silently drew her lips to Saito's ear.

“W-what?”

Saito asked looking at her burning eyes.

“Please.”

“Y-yes?”

“Till the morning breaks, be gentle.”

In the middle of this intimate… dangerous atmosphere, Saito stroked Louise’s head.

“…Ngh!”

Louise leaked out a moan.

Such an act from Louise made Saito almost die on the spot.

What I want to do, I cannot do. What about the others, who are in a room next to theirs?

So, Saito torn by such conflict, desperately endured… until Louise said in an angry tone.

“Hey you…”

“Eh?”

“You put your tongue in that maid’s mouth, didn’t you?”

It wasn’t really me putting it in, but Siesta…

But saying that makes no difference, at least when your opponent is Louise.

Oh no, he will be punched! Or maybe kicked!

Guard! Guard guard!

Saito frantically tried to protect his groin, after hearing Louise saying that in a sulky voice. Neither a kick, nor a slap followed.

Instead, a bullet of pink flew and knocked Saito down.

Louise, with a blush on her cheeks, lifted her moist eyes up to Saito and said in a sulky voice,

“I want to have the same thing to gloss over.”

Alright?

Not alright?

The switch was triggered.

"Alright."

Saito framed her face with his hands, and, in trance, pressed his mouth against hers.

“Nh…” Louise closed her eyes.

Taking the opportunity, his hand sneaked beneath her shirt and touched her breast. However, Louise Françoise did not show any of the resistance she had a while ago in the shallop.

Why doesn’t she?

Maybe this is a dream?

How do I confirm that?

“Ah, indeed. If one feels pain, then one can’t be sleeping!”

Well, to feel pain, I only need Louise to hit me.

Hm, what should I do to make her hit me?

Ah, say bad words!

Saito, lost in his excitement, said, pressing his hand against her chest.

“Is this a breast?”

The sweet atmosphere disappeared immediately.

It was as if someone chanted Dispel Magic and blew it off like smoke…

“Is it bad?”

Slap.

Louise’s palm slapped him.

“Yup…”

“Are my breasts bad?”

Slap slap.

Her palm continued to hit.

Slap slap slap.

“They are flat and no good.”

He muttered in a silent voice as Louise’s palm continued to slap him.

“Aaah…”

The pain helped him to realize that it was reality.

So, this was not a dream.

But…

“No, stop, I was wrong.”

Slap slap slap slap slap slap.

Weren’t there other ways to confirm whether it was a dream or not? He realized too late.

“Wait. T-they are small but firm…”

“Hold your tongue!”

Louise’s knee flew up.

As it hit straight into his belly; Saito fainted.

In Tiffania's bedroom, Siesta was sleeping on the bed. A jar of wine was rolling next to her.

Tiffania, leaving Siesta, took her harp and went out of the room.

Sitting on a chair in the courtyard, Tiffania began to play the harp.

And the sounds of the Founder's homesickness… melted with the night wind and wrapped Westwood Village up.

Agnes sat on a chair of in the living room, drinking sake.

She heard the sounds of a harp coming from the courtyard.

Agnes closed her eyes and submerged herself into Tiffania’s performance.

“What’s the matter, Commander-san?”

Asked Derflinger, who she had as her drinking partner. Agnes opened her eyes.

Instead of the usual musketeer commander’s steel, one could see a girl's anxiety in her eyes.

“No… I just recalled my hometown. I can’t return there… such a useless memory.”

“You can’t return there?”

Self-mockingly, Agnes murmured,

“It doesn’t exist anymore. It exists only in the corner of my memories.”

After a while, Derflinger said…

“What? A hometown is just a word. Find a new hometown.”

Agnes became silent and continued listening to the tune, settled, in the course of time; a gentle smile appeared on her face and she nodded.

Louise watched the unconscious Saito, who had started a journey into the world of sleep. *If only he had not made that remark about my breast size,* she thought passionately…

"…Melody?"

She noticed a tune playing outside the window.

Who?

Was that Tiffania?

Somehow, she started to feel nostalgic. While listening to the sounds… Louise recalled the other Void user.

Then felt uneasy…

That Myoznitnirn from before…

Though she could not understand why, she seemed to aim at Louise.

This Void's familiar was not an ally…

And if there are Void familiars besides Saito, then there should be Void users as well…

It was an unknown, big flow of events. *I myself, am only driftwood in this big flow.*

But… looking at the familiar breathe in his sleep, Louise thought…

I have Saito.

At that time, it was Saito who saved me.

Aye, I may be just driftwood in a rapid stream. But… I am tightly tied with a rope.

She thought…

The whole "noble pride" thing was long ago rooted out of Louise.

She wanted to use her God given powers on far more important things. Like… for the clueless familiar.

Louise quietly whispered to Saito.

First of all, I'll look for the way to bring you home.

At that moment, she did not say those important words.

If she did… Saito would be chained to her by those words.

Sounds of harp continued.

…This Tiffania, just who is she?

She looked like she was hiding something deep inside.

And she cured Saito's near-to-death injuries.

Tomorrow, I'll ask for details.… Louise closed her eyes.

"N…" Stirring, Saito woke up.

Next to him Louise was sleeping.

Her face, pressed closely against Saito's chest, looked relaxed as she continued to sleep.

Seeing Louise like that… reminded him of a beautiful girl, carrying Elfin blood.

She, like Louise, was a Void user. Still, he'd have to talk about this with Louise. *Tomorrow, I will speak with her,* Saito thought.

On the other side of window, under the moonlight… he heard the half-elf girl, Tiffania, playing her harp.

On the other day, when he heard these sounds, he was reminded of his

hometown, and it was painful…

But now it was different.

Because Louise’s head rested on his chest.

Something dear spread in his heart.

Even though dawn started to break… Tiffania's playing continued.

The serenade of dreaming lovers echoed throughout the forest near Saxe-Gotha, soothing its listeners and healing their hearts.

1. ↑ sounds made during panting